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"MY HAND IS NOT MINE! 'TIS PROMISED TO ANOTHER!" SHE WAILED.

LOVE-MAD;

Or, Betrothed, Married, Divorced, and—.

BY WM. MASON TURNER, M. D.

CHAPTER I.

GLOOM ON THE HEARTH.

"Oh! Fanny, I had rather die than go into this company!" exclaimed the fair young creature, suddenly sweeping her head of luxuriant,

golden curls away from the manipulating care of the tender-hearted sewing-maid, and burying her face in her warm, throbbing hands.

A sob burst from the pent-up bosom, and a wild shudder passed over her frame.

"Nay—nay, Miss Agnes, do not give way so! It will be worse for you; and then—then—you see—it will soon be over—all this fuss and show. Well, well, if truth be told, I can't see what *has* come over your uncle, and—"

"What has come over him, Fanny? Why, *wealth!* Wealth that should not belong to him

—wealth, worked hard for, by my poor dead murdered father! Nay, nay, Fanny!" and she shook her head sadly, yet emphatically—"I know it! for I feel it—and who did it? Ay, Fanny, wealth has come, and come gloriously, over St. Clair Arlington—wealth that should be mine!"

The maid said nothing for a moment, but leaning against the bureau in the room, gazed fixedly at her young mistress, as if lost in admiration at the peerless beauty of the soft angel face, surrounded by its glittering halo of lustrous hair.

The room, gazed fixedly at her young mistress, as if lost in admiration at the peerless beauty of the soft, angel face, surrounded by its glittering halo of lustrous hair.

Agnes Arlington was a beautiful girl. Perhaps she was twenty years of age—perhaps younger—certainly not older. There was, however, care-lines across the broad, white forehead—cut by the keen graver of Trouble. The mouth, too, though flexible for grief or mirth, was closed firmly together, shutting in the rows of pearly teeth—shutting in, too, dark trouble which was gnawing at her young heart.

And then, without lowering the curtain, the maid lit the wax-taper, and with a half-sigh, turned again to her mistress, and gathered up the rich tresses in her hand. This time the girl did not take her head away, but nestled it softly back against the warm bosom of her only friend, the sewing-maid.

And Fanny leaned over, as she caressed the curls, which she was putting in array, and said:

"It is a strange affair, Miss Agnes, and there are more than you who think that your poor old father ought to have outlived his grudge and given you what, despite all the law, it seems to me is yours! But now—"

"There is too much law, Fanny, and wondrous little justice!" said the girl, bitterly, interrupting her; "and why that 'grudge?' Because, giddy, young and somewhat willful, as I was, at the time, I would go to the ball in the village with Clavis Warne. Clavis—poor, dear Clavis! and he only a visitor here—my father's guest, my lover! Oh! I love him still, though four long years have passed since then, and not one word from him, and father dead—murdered!—and uncle St. Clair here as owner of this large estate, and I here, under the law, as his ward! Oh, God! why am I spared for such a life? Why do I not die?"

"Was it not rather, Miss Agnes, that you failed to go to the ball with that man, Delaney Howe, that your father, for a willful disobedience, as he termed it, disinherited you?"

A scowl wrinkled the angel face at the name mentioned by Fanny. The large blue eyes seemed to change in hue.

"Mention not his name, Fanny! That man is my dark shadow—my evil angel; and I loathe—I scorn him! And yet, he is my uncle's friend! And that uncle sanctions his suit, and Fanny, I am not of age, and I cannot help it!"

"You can help it, Miss Agnes, and you should!" said the domestic, in a low tone. "I would appeal to the law, or would flee away, under the cover of some dark night, or—in your ear, Agnes—I would drive a knife into Delaney Howe's heart!"

The young girl started, and, turning around, gazed in the face of her maid.

There was no swerving there; all was sternness, earnest and honest.

"No, no, Fanny; you mean well; but do not speak to me thus again! Do not tempt me! I cannot do as you say; for then there would be no hope of Clavis, and I live for him yet—live on the memory of the sweet past! Oh, no! no!" and she turned shudderingly away from the open window.

That window, in the second story of the large, shambling old mansion of Revolutionary date, looked out far over a wide-stretching plain—a lonely cemetery in one end, here and there spectral poplars swaying in the wind. But now, the night had settled down; clouds, low and heavy, hurtled menac-

ingly in the hot, close air; the moaning wind crept around the old mansion and over the plain. Gloom was upon every thing.

The maid noticed the gesture of her mistress, and shivering herself, as a dark memory came over her—shivering despite the sweltering July heat—stepped to the window to lower the sash, as if to shut out some horrid sight.

But Agnes turned suddenly, and placed her hand on the arm of the maid.

"Stop, stop, Fanny! The Shadow cannot harm you! Nor can you see it in the—"

"But, Miss Agnes, to-night is the fourteenth of the month—and the moon shines under the clouds! Oh, God! if it shines through, the Shadow will be there!" and the servant turned shrinkingly from the window.

"Ay! you are right, Fanny, and in my trouble I had forgotten!" said Agnes, in a low voice. "It is the night of the month—the fated night—the bloody fourteenth! when my father disappeared—when he was murdered! as I know, and when old Noon disappeared, too! And the birth-night of St. Clair Arlington, my uncle; this night he is to celebrate, despite wind or weather! This night I am to be mistress! This night I am to be persecuted by that monster, Delaney Howe! Well, well, Fanny; God be our friend; it cannot be helped! Go on, for it is getting late, and nine o'clock is the hour."

Without a word the domestic proceeded with her work. The golden curls, were one by one, neatly arranged and looped up; a flashing jewel was placed here, another there; then an elegant robe of black satin was arranged on her form; a string of pearls was thrown around her neck, and, as the great hall-clock down-stairs struck eight, Agnes Arlington, the dazzling, disinherited beauty and belle of Labberton, viewed her resplendent form and glowing face in the mirror.

There was a tap at the door, and a note was handed in.

Agnes opened the sheet and glanced through it. A pallor and an expression of pain came to her face, as she read the few lines. But, she perused them calmly through to the end.

The note was brief, reading thus:

"Come down into the library when you are dressed, and do not take all night to this work. I want to see you on business, to give you certain instructions, which it will be well for you to heed. Don't keep me waiting—remember that."

"ST. CLAIR ARLINGTON."

Agnes Arlington heaved a deep sigh, and murmured:

"Oh, that such a man is my uncle! Leave the light burning, Fanny, and go down and see that the servants are duly attired and ready for the birth-night festival."

She turned away. As she did so, a vivid flash of lightning gleamed over the wide-stretching, ghostly plain, and a hollow thunder-note pealed ominously in the hot air.

Agnes Arlington glanced instinctively out over the dreary waste-land, and then, with a shudder, she wheeled abruptly and left the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW.

"HEAVEN preserve us, sir! I've lost the way, and—ah! great God!" he suddenly exclaimed, at that moment, a blinding flash of lightning glared over the lonely road which ran through the dark woods, and a thunder-peal growled its hoarse notes along the black aisles of the forest.

The horses attached to the carriage reared fearfully; and, snorting in very fright, backed the vehicle rudely against a heavy tree by the roadside.

Again the lightning flashed, illuminating, for an instant, the dim, forest fringed road, and then a thunderbolt crashed again.

Brief as was the blinding glimmer of the flash, it lit up a wild and fearful scene.

The place was a lonely road—narrow, precipitous and cut up with gullies, down which hissing streams were roaring in wild torrents. The tall, gloomy trees, overhanging the way and interlacing above their spectral arms, making a black, dismal, far-stretching archway, grew up to the very edge of the old stage-road.

Backed up to one side—the trembling animals looking around with terror-stricken eyes—was a common country carriage, splashed with mud, and streaming with the down-pouring sheets of rain. Behind the carriage was strapped a large traveling-trunk. On the seat, the reins clutched in his shivering, almost nerveless grasp, his face blanched with fright, cowered the driver.

Inside the vehicle sat one person—a young man, with pale stern features. As the driver spoke, he put his head out of the window.

"Hold your horses up! Give them the whip," he said, in a stern voice, "or they'll crush the carriage to atoms!"

"Can't do it, sir; can't do it! They won't mind!" replied the man.

"Can't do it! Why— Ha!"

At that moment the black forest was lit up as with the splendor of a mid-day sun; then a deafening detonation, and a tall giant pine, not forty yards away, was riven from top to bottom, its fragments flying in every direction.

The young man waited no longer; but, buttoning his coat up to the chin, he hurled the carriage door open, and springing out, rushed to the horses and seized them by the bit.

"Give them their head!" he shouted to the driver, at the same time forcing them gently forward, while, with his left hand, he patted them kindly on the neck.

The driver loosed the reins, and now that they had some one to give them confidence, the animals bent their necks obediently, and drew the carriage out into the middle of the road. The young man stopped them at a word, and clambering up alongside the driver, took the reins.

"And, so you are lost, are you, my man?" he asked, turning suddenly to the driver.

"Yes, sir; you see, sir, there is a cross-road out there," and he pointed ahead of him. "I don't know where it leads to, and, you see, sir, this is my second trip from the station to the village. I'm a new hand, sir."

"Ah! Well, let me see! As I said, we must get away from this wood, or the next thing, we won't know what struck us!" and he smiled grimly, as at that moment another crash of thunder awoke the echoes around them.

"Yes," continued the young man, "we'll go straight on, and not take the crossway. And, my good fellow, I will drive."

He spoke to the horses, touched them lightly with the whip, and the carriage moved on.

Their progress was slow; now they were on fine ground, and now floundering in one of the deep gullies down which the waters were madly roaring. But the young man, who held the reins in a firm grasp, kept his eyes bent steadily before him, and made the horses stick to their work.

Gradually the trees on either side grew more sparse; by degrees there was a lifting of the inky darkness, and, at last, they were clear out of the gloomy woods.

The young man checked the horses, and once more glanced around him.

"We cannot be far, at all events, from Labberton," he said, "and—ha! My God! what is that?" he suddenly exclaimed, as a white figure dashed from behind, swiftly by the carriage, and fled on in the night.

It was gone, without noise or sound soever, in the twinkling of an eye—the pale spectral glimmer of the flying drapery, disappearing as a gravestone sinking in the earth.

The driver uttered a cry:

"'Tis the ghost of Squire Arlington!"

"Arlington! Arlington, my man?"

"Yes, sir; murdered on the plain a half-year ago. Let's turn back and—"

"Nonsense! and—ha! Look!" and he pointed with his hand far away, in the gloom of the night, toward the right. Several bright lights shone in the black night, betokening life and comfort of some sort.

"We must go there for the night, my good man, and crave hospitality; when the morning comes we can go on to Labberton."

"Why, sir, of course," said the driver; "but, sir, there is a fence there, as you see, and there's no road to the house—if it is a house!" and he closed his sentence at a low breath.

"Wait here a moment and I'll reconnoiter," giving the reins to the other. "It looks to me, as well as I can see, as if it were a low flat country, and we may not need a road."

As he spoke he placed a hand on the haunch of the nearest horse and sprung to the ground.

In a moment he had disappeared, but only soon to return and mount to the seat.

"I have let down a pannel of the fence," he said, "and it is an open, level field the other side. I also found traces of an old road. Come, we'll go; the lights cannot be far off."

Again the carriage moved on. Turning abruptly, he guided the animals through the gap in the fence, and then they entered the large, bare field.

The storm was now fast abating; a high wind had sprung up, and the clouds were gradually drifting away toward the northward.

Suddenly the moon shone out with a splendid radiance on the plain, lighting up a weird, wondrous picture.

The horses started back—the carriage was forced sideways on a low hillock, and both the men saw plainly defined on the ground, a large, distorted shadow.

Then, with a crash, the carriage went over, and a cry of pain moaned out on the air.

CHAPTER III.

A LIGHTNING STROKE.

WE must go back a few hours in our story.

Despite the brewing storm, the lordly old mansion of St. Clair Arlington was lighted from top to bottom in honor of the royal event, the birth-night of the present owner.

St. Clair Arlington intended to make a grand affair of this, his birth-night—and he had means in abundance.

He had long looked for the coming of this eventful night, for it was on this occasion he expected to melt his neighbors of the village into something like warmth—to break down the icy reserve existing between him and them—to do away with the coldness and distrust with which they had treated him, since his sudden return from—nobody knew whither, and his quiet induction into his brother's—old John Arlington's—immense property.

He intended, on this evening to show them what a genial fellow—what a liberal-hearted fellow, he was. So he had made extensive preparations; his perfumed cards of invitation he had sent around by his liveried coachman, and the *elite* and fashion had been solicited to honor the occasion with their presence.

Strange to say, despite the evident coldness with which St. Clair Arlington had been looked upon, there were but few regrets returned to him. His heart had glowed within him at the reception his cards had met, and then he extended his preparations to a princely lavishness.

The long-expected night had rolled around, and the glorious old mansion glowed from cellar to garret with flashing lights.

Agnes Arlington rapped lightly on the oak panel of the library door. There was no response, though she indistinctly heard within, the sound of slow, deliberate strides.

Again she rapped. This time the steps ceased; then a rough voice bade her enter.

She turned the bolt softly, pushed open the door, and stood within the room. A brilliant light streamed down over the richly furnished apartment from an old-fashioned but massive and costly chandelier, suspended from the ceiling.

The rays from the many tapers fell full on St. Clair Arlington, who had paused in his promenade, and was now standing leaning one of his bejeweled hands upon the back of a chair.

He was a fine-looking man, this uncle of Agnes Arlington. Tall, erect, portly—a large, massive round face—garnished with long, sweeping side-whiskers, the lip and chin smoothly shaven, and a broad, well-developed forehead, made him a man at whom it were pleasant to look twice.

But behind the glittering glasses, bridged over the nose, shone a pair of eyes into which it *was not* pleasant to look. Few there were, indeed, who ever were allowed to gaze into the depths of those orbs, and read the tale they told.

The gentleman started involuntarily, when the girl entered, and he saw her splendid beauty; for a moment he gazed at her with undisguised admiration.

"By Jove, Agnes, you *are* a pretty girl!" he exclaimed, rather coarsely; "and I don't blame my friend, Mr. Howe, for being smitten with you! Don't frown so! I care not, you know, and—yes, he is!—Howe is a friend of mine! But, what the deuce do you mean," he rudely exclaimed, "by appearing on such an occasion as this, Agnes, in a *black* dress? Did you do it," and he scowled at her darkly, "because you knew it would displease me?"

The girl's eyes were now flashing with scorn and indignation. Her bosom swelled; but a softer expression passed over the beautiful face, and a tear filled her eye.

"You are cruel, uncle!" she said, in a low, bitter tone; "but you have the power to be so! You *know* why I wear black! You cannot, nor can I, forget that seven months ago I had a father, and that I have none now!"

"I had not forgotten it, my pretty girl! But he left you little enough to remember him by."

"I am grateful for what he *did* leave me. But a truce to this. I am here at your command. What do you wish with me?" and she gazed him fixedly in the face.

In the first place, Agnes, you must play the mistress to-night, and help me in the duties of the hour. Of course, my child, you will do your best, and it will be better for you."

"Yes, uncle?" and she gazed him straight in the face, as if expecting him to speak further.

The man hesitated, but, as if summoning up his resolution, he said:

"I want to speak to you about Delaney Howe."

"Delaney Howe! I detest the man and loathe his very name!" and the girl made a step, as if about to turn away, but the man did not move. He simply said:

"I do not doubt it, Agnes; nevertheless, I *will* speak to you about Mr. Howe, and the day may come when you will think as well of him as I do."

At that moment, a sudden gust of wind sighed and moaned around the old mansion; the gleaming of a lurid flash glittered through the slats of the blinds, and for a moment dimmed even the splendid radiance of the lights from the chandelier.

Following a minute after, came the long, disconnected peal of thunder, swelling grandly its deafening scale; then dying away in the far distance with a solemn echo.

St. Clair Arlington stepped hastily to the window, and pushing aside the blind, he flung up the sash and leaned out, while he drew the outside shutters together with a nervous jerk, and, lowering the window, stepped back into the room.

"A storm is coming up, and I do not like the glare of lightning," he said, his face slightly pale, then he went on:—

"I sent for you to inform you that Mr. Howe will be present this evening, and that he has something to say to you. See to it, Agnes, that you do not shun him; see to it that you listen to him, and mark what I say!—if you wish for favor and protection from me, heed his words! Now you had better go. Ha! yes, they are coming. Hurry out, Agnes, and receive the guests," and he made way for her—half pushing her from the room as the rattle of carriage-wheels echoed in the apartment.

The girl gave her relative one look, half of defiance, half of entreaty, and, without any word or further gesture, left the library.

When she had gone, St. Clair Arlington shut the door quickly, and turned the key in the lock.

No sooner had he done this, than from behind a tall book-case, in the deep shadow of which he had stood, a tall young man stepped out into the center of the room, and stood under the full glare of the light.

He was a wicked-looking fellow, despite the glossy broadcloth in which he was arrayed; despite the glittering stones which sparkled on his bosom. He was a man of about thirty years of age, rather above the medium height, thick-set and muscular. His hair was light, and his red and bloated face was covered with a straggling tawny beard. Over his left eyebrow was a long, crimson scar, as if made by a saber-cut. It was an old scar, as could be seen at a glance; but on this night, as the man stood under the chandelier, it shone brilliant and clear.

For a moment he looked at the owner of the old mansion, and then flung himself carelessly, and as if perfectly at home, into a chair.

"Well, Sainty," he said, in a low, grating voice, "I heard her, and her views on *your friend*; but I'll have her yet!" and he emphasized this assertion with a foul oath.

"I am glad you stood back there, Delaney," said the other, "for now, my dear fellow, you see that my niece does not like you."

"I should think I did! She *despises* me, the impertinent jade! But I'll not give her up!"

"I did my best, Delaney."

"*Did* you, Sainty? Are you quite sure you could not have been more positive with her? Methinks, old fellow, you are her guardian; and then, too, the girl is penniless without you, and—*don't forget it, Sainty—without ME!*" and he darted a quick, fiery glance at the other.

"Exactly, my friend; but Delaney, why are you so anxious to marry Agnes? *She is not rich, and—*"

"You are my friend! You'll endow her well when the bullion is found—*of course*; and why, if you do not, then it may be, I'll *contest that little piece of p. per.*"

Old Arlington sprang to his feet as if eliot—his eyes flashed fire—and he thrust his right hand quickly into his bosom.

But Delaney Howe's eagle eye was upon him, and a sickly smile swept over the rich man's face, as he said, in a trembling voice:

"You joke well, my friend, for—"

At that moment a low, plaintive cry rung out on the outside air, and again, and again.

Delaney Howe rose to his feet, approached the window which old Arlington had closed, flung open the shutter and peered out.

For a moment, out in the gloom, revealed by the straight flash of light from the chandelier, a pale, beauteous, yet haggard face, with its great, staring black eyes, the long, unfettered masses of raven hair streaming unprotected in the rising wind, showed like a framed picture, and then as another low wail quivered in the air, it disappeared.

Slowly Delaney Howe closed the shutters again, and retired to his seat.

"'Tis Dora!" he muttered, in a low, half-scared voice, "and abroad again on an *unlucky night!* Poor, crazy thing; I must pity her! and it is going to storm. I sometimes think, Sainty," and he lowered his voice to a deep, hushed whisper, "that Dora *has seen things!*"

Before Mr. Arlington could reply, the rattle of carriage-wheels sounded outside. Then again, and again.

The guests were now coming, indeed, and it seemed in a body.

The gentleman, the owner of the property, rose to his feet, drove away the brooding care from his face, and whispering a few words to his friend, turned and left the library.

As he entered the brilliantly lit hall, now filled with company, gay and laughing, a sudden flash of lightning, followed by a startling, appalling thunder-stroke, streamed in through the open door.

St. Clair Arlington threw his hand to his head, staggered, and fell heavily to the carpet.

CHAPTER IV.

COLD STEEL.

THE horses struggled fearfully to extricate themselves from the traces, and in their plunging managed to get to their feet. But, the carriage was still upset, and, were they inclined to do so, the animals could not run away.

Slowly the young man rose to his feet, but with his right hand he supported his left arm. Agony of pain was stamped upon his features, on which the moon, now shining brightly out, gleamed down.

He looked about him. There lay the driver, groaning piteously, and begging for help. The young man pushed him slightly with his boot.

"Get up, my man!" he said half-sternly, half-encouragingly; "up with you! I am worse hurt than you; my arm is broken, I know."

The driver ceased his groaning and then sprang up.

"Sorry, sir; very sorry you are hurt; and I hope 'tisn't so bad as you think, sir."

"I am suffering a great deal, my man, I—"

Before he could finish the sentence, he reeled and then sunk down where he stood.

"This is awful! What shall I do?" exclaimed the frightened driver.

"Right your carriage and get the man into it!" said a low, deep voice, right at his elbow. "Come, I am old and weak, but I'll help you."

The driver looked back at the little bent form, which had, as it were, risen from the ground by his side, then said:

"I am much obliged to you for help. Wait; I'll unhitch the horses, and then we can see what is to be done."

The driver at once unhooked the traces and un-gearied the horses. Tying them to a tree near by, he soon returned to the carriage, which he righted in a very few moments, and went for the horses.

"And how came you to be in this deserted field?" asked the old man.

"Why, I got lost. I'm a new hand in these parts, and I was bringing a passenger from the station at Ollarway to Labberton. The horses got frightened at what I believe was the shadow of the devil, right down there, and backed over on that bank. I believe it was the *devil himself*!" and the man shuddered.

"Ah! the Shadow! You saw it, eh? Ha! ha! Many have seen it before. But come; the village is three miles from here, and you are not in the road. That passenger of yours is badly hurt, I fear. You had better place him inside, and drive to where you see those lights. That is only a half-mile, and the owner keeps open house almost all the time. The gentleman, too, needs attention."

"Yes, and whose house is it, old man?" asked the driver, busying himself about the reins.

There was no response. The driver turned. The old man was not there. He had gone as suddenly as he had come.

The driver took the young man in his brawny grasp, and bore him gently to the carriage. Not a groan escaped the poor fellow's lips. He was unconscious from the pain and shock.

Carefully the driver placed him inside, half-re-

clining on the seat. Then he closed the door. Mounting to his box, he took the reins, and struck the horses smartly with the whip. The carriage rolled away rapidly over the plain, toward the lights still flashing in the distance.

All was consternation in the Arlington mansion, as the master was so suddenly stricken down by that blinding flash of lightning. Though the hallway was crowded with the gay, merry-hearted, richly-dressed guests, yet not one of them had felt the stroke.

In an instant all was confusion. Several of the gentlemen hastened to the side of the fallen man, and among them suddenly appeared Delaney Howe, of whom everybody had heard so much and knew so little, and that little not to his credit and reputation. Terror was on his face as he looked upon the livid features of Mr. Arlington. In an instant, as a shade of fearful anxiety passed over his face, Howe had knelt by the side of the fallen man.

"He lives! he lives!" he exclaimed, in a voice of exultation. "He is only stunned; send for a physician at once!"

He rose to his feet and looked around; his eyes fell on Agnes Arlington.

Pale, stern, marble-like, the orphan girl had drawn near, her sable dress making an almost painful contrast with the butterfly apparel of those around her.

"You are right, Mr. Howe; we will summon a physician. May I ask you to be kind enough to send a message at once to the village?"

Delaney Howe glanced at her; then, bowing low, he immediately left the apartment.

The gentlemen carried the senseless form into the library, and with a few hasty regrets to the marble-like niece, wishes for the best, they took their departure.

Agnes stood alongside the unconscious man. There he lay, helpless as an infant—his mouth slightly opened, a deep, stertorous breath, now and then, at long intervals, filling his lungs; the eyes half-showing under the purple-ringed lids; a fearful, livid hue covering the blank, expressionless face; the hands, half-clutched, falling limp and nerveless by his side.

The storm, now at its height, roared and howled around the mansion. The lurid lightning blazed continuously, and the pealing thunder broke, it seemed, just above the roof.

But Agnes quailed not at the loud-breathing storm without. There was a storm in her bosom raging as wildly as the elemental battle was fought on the outside of the time-stained mansion.

"Oh! Fanny—Fanny!" she murmured in an under-breath; "unwittingly, you have put fierce thoughts into my head! Tempted! tempted!" she hissed, as at that moment the lapel of St. Clair Arlington's coat was blown back by a wind-gust, that forced itself through the crevices of the rear door of the library.

The girl paused, and gazed with fiery eyes at something revealed in the breast-pocket of the coat. It was an ivory-handled knife.

A violent trembling seized her; an iron sternness crept over her features. She made a step forward:

"I'll do it! I'll do it! if only to avenge my murdered father! I'll murder—*murder*, as he murdered!"

Stooping, she drew the glittering steel from its sheath, and raised it in her unflinching grasp.

CHAPTER V.

VISIONS.

A WILD, stormy night in November. Snowflakes hurtling in the air; a bleak north wind blowing around the corners and under the eaves of an old, storm-battered mansion.

Without, all desolation—dreariness. Within this mansion, comfort, luxury, warmth and cheer!

The hour, eleven. All sounds hushed in the large old house; and the wailing wind blowing so shrill

and cutting over the waste land, sounds fearfully distinct in the warm, dimly-lighted, quaint old room.

Up and down the room, an old man, with a few scattered locks of gray falling down his neck, walks. His hands clasped behind him, his old head bent upon his breast, deep, anxious thought upon the wrinkled brow.

The clock strikes twelve. Suddenly, the old man pauses. He bends his ear. A low rap sounds on the door. The door opens and another person enters—likewise an old man—affliction beaming from his face, as his eyes fall upon the occupant of the room.

No words. The door is closed and locked; the light is lowered.

A half-hour, and two men, clad well, to protect them from the weather, cautiously leave by the rear door and go out into the wind-storm. They carry between them an iron-bound chest. Now they have disappeared in the gray gloom of the falling snow; and the far-stretching plain, white and ghastly, looks like the winding-sheet of a dead Old Year.

The vision has gone!

Another wintry evening. Snow again on the ground; a bitter north wind, raw and bleak, creeping again over the wintry waste-land.

Lights of a village town, gleaming dull and dead, in the thick air.

A deserted bar-room in the village inn. The lights low and the stove getting cold.

One lamp, bright and glittering, suspended over a table. At that table, two men; one old, shriveled, shrunken, with trembling fingers and scattered snow-white hair—a half-wild fire in his eyes, an unsteadiness in his movements.

The other, a bewhiskered face, bronzed by hot suns, a large frame and swelling muscles. A wide-brimmed hat pulled over his eyes.

Cards on the table; wine at the elbow.

The storm howling louder than ever.

A shambling figure, tottering along over a wide waste-land. A pistol-shot, and then another! A wall on the air. A crouching, bent form—a flying, spectral figure!

CHAPTER VI.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

IN a distant corner of the wide, out-stretching plain, on this eventful night—the one on which we have opened our story, an unpretending light gleamed out. It came from a small, humble-looking frame building, just one story high. The quiet little abode stood under the grim shadows of several old worm-eaten Lombardy poplars, which reared themselves in the gloom, like giant statues.

Just to the left of the house, was a little graveyard—the pale, rain-beaten, time-worn marbles standing out in the gloom, unprotected by railing, and unrelieved by the friendly foliage of willows or other trees.

This little cemetery was peopled with the dead that came out from the mansions of the wealthy on the plain. And in it are found, to-day, many names which have shone with a brilliant luster in our legislative halls, and in high offices, the gift of the nation.

The village had its own humble God's acre, where those who died were laid away to the last sleep.

Of course, there were many wild tales current among the country-folks and villagers, of strange sights seen on the plain. And the writer has heard one—a most marvelous one, and well vouched for—of an old Padroon who, in a winding-sheet, prowled over the plain on every fitting opportunity; but, wind or storm, shine or fair, *always* on Christmas Eve.

Latterly, however, another singular apparition, far outstripping in terror anything before told, heard of, or seen on the dreary waste, had made its appearance to vex and torment the rest and peace of the villagers. This wonderful appearance was a large black shadow, showing on the plain at a cer-

tain locality, between the hours of eleven and twelve o'clock at night, and *always*, when the moon shone, on the eve of the fourteenth of the month.

By a strange notion—freak of fancy, some termed it—it was conceded by the superstitious (and they numbered the larger portion of the village) that this shadow had something to do with the sudden death, or mysterious disappearance, of old John Arlington, late owner of the Arlington mansion, which, as the reader has seen, was now the property of the state—St. Clair Arlington—the brother.

This was, of course, simply absurd, for anybody, almost, would tell you that old John Arlington, the rich, miserly old man—so miserly, indeed, that he dared not put his immense savings in a bank, but, caring naught for interest, and all for principal and its safety, kept it, nobody knew where. Well, as we were saying, almost everybody in the village would tell you that, seven or eight months ago, old John Arlington very foolishly got intoxicated, one cold, snowy night, at the Washington House in the village—played cards with a sun-browned foreigner until a late hour of the night, and then having lost all the money he had about him, reeled away to his old mansion, the other side of the plain. They furthermore will tell you that, in company with his ancient body-servant—as quaint and odd as was his master—the old miser had fallen from the rustic bridge over the creek, and was drowned. This they asseverate with additional force, and at a low breath, when they swear that on the following morning, two large holes were seen in the ice!

The old servant had followed his master, even unto death.

There were those in the village who said that old John Arlington was not dead. That, in one of his freaks, sometimes happening to him, the old miser had gone somewhere; but no one knew whither.

This, however, was by the most considered even idler talk than the other—the appearance of the Shadow, as a visitation to earth by the uneasy spirit of the rich old man.

This thing was certain; in the old Padroon burying-ground there was a handsome tomb erected, and on it, cut deep with the graver's chisel, were the plain words:

"JOHN ARLINGTON: aged 67 years and 4 months. Erected by his brother, ST. CLAIR ARLINGTON."

The strangest part of this plain epitaph—if we can call it such—was, the small characters used for the name of the deceased, and the *display*, as the printers call it, used in bringing out the name of the sorrowing brother.

The tomb was erected alongside an old worm-eaten slab, whose half-erased letters told that underneath the stone slept the mortal part of one "KLAUDER VAN AARLINGTON, a good and worthy man." Of course, the reader sees, from the patronymic, that old John was a direct descendant of the Padroons, and by consequence, not necessarily stingy, but absolutely economical, and saving with his means.

But we are wandering. We will return to the small frame house, in which a single pale light was burning.

The wild storm of thunder, wind and rain had blown over, and the moon, from behind the broken cloud-banks in the sky scudding along rapidly toward the north, shone down with a brilliant splendor upon the outstretched plain.

We will enter the house for a moment. Walking meditatively up and down the small, plainly-furnished room, was an old woman, certainly past sixty. Her white cap scrupulously clean; her smoothly-brushed, frosted hair gathered back from her calm forehead; her hands crossed meekly upon her bosom; her very step, all told the pure soul—the guileless heart of the aged creature.

She paused in her promenade, and turning to the open hearth-fire gave it a poke and a rake, so that the flashing sparks flew up the wide throat of the chimney in a glittering cloud. Then she examined with a fork the contents of a pot, suspended on a

hook, simmering above the fire. Then she turned again to her walk, but paused suddenly, and bent her ear.

Long she listened. The dying wind outside moaned and sighed deeply. But the old woman was listening for other sounds, which came not, though she fancied she had heard them. Straightening herself up, she shook her head:

"No, no; not yet! not yet!" she murmured. "And both are away, both away, and I have been all alone on this terrible night—this, the night of the Shadow! He, my boy! my first-born! God shield him! I know people say hard things of him; I know they distrust him, and yet, *where* does he get so much money? He tells me he earns it, earns it honestly; and if he is wild a little, if people do not like him, why, my darling boy is kind to me, his old, stricken mother. And more than all, *he is my son!* Ha!" She paused again and bent her head, listening intently, with her hand to her ear, for several moments. Her frame shook, and she almost tottered to the door, and bent her ear to the keyhole, through which the night-wind was moaning drearily.

This time she did hear something—some sounds—but they were not those she longed to hear and to welcome.

First, a low but distinct whistle sounded on the air. There was no response from the house, and in an instant the lonely old woman had extinguished the light, and slipped a bar across the door. The whistle came again; still no response.

Cautious steps were then heard approaching the dwelling; then a low tap sounded on the door. The poor old woman shivered with fright, and lifted her eyes to heaven in meek, silent supplication.

Again the rap; this time louder than before. And then, as no response came, the door cracked and rattled as if a heavy man had tried its strength with his weight. But the bar held firmly.

Then ensued a low conversation, the indistinct muttering of which could be plainly heard by the helpless old woman within.

This consultation on the outside lasted only a moment. Then a gruff, hard voice said aloud:

"There is nobody at home, that's certain; but the commodore must be notified."

Only a moment elapsed, when a slight, rustling sound was heard. It seemed to come from the bottom of the door, and sounded like the rattling of paper.

Then the footsteps moved off, the sounds died away, and all was silence again.

For ten minutes the lonely old woman did not move. She was afraid of the sound of her own footsteps. But, at length, summoning up courage, she relit the lamp, taking it away from near the window, and drew cautiously near the door.

She started, as she saw at her feet a long, yellow envelope. She hesitated not a moment, but stooped and picked it up. It was sealed.

The old woman adjusted her glasses, and gazed at the envelope. It was directed rudely, in pencil, to her son.

The poor old mother looked at the missive earnestly. Then, glancing around her, she suddenly tore open the envelope, and with her nervous fingers drew out the small strip of paper within. At the top was coarsely engraved a death's-head. Then below followed a few printed lines. But what the poor mother read was written rudely in pencil, and ran as follows:

"WORTHY COMMODORE:—Strange sail in sight! You are wanted to direct the chase. Come to the rendezvous. No new hands. BROTHERS."

The old lady carefully refolded the letter, and placed it in her bosom, as an expression of terrible pain came over her face. She walked to the door and looked out cautiously.

The moon was now shining brightly down. The widow glanced toward the silent country, so lonely and desolate. Every grave-stone was lighted up. She started violently and shrunk away.

Seated at the base of the new-made tomb of old John Arlington, was the figure of a man, or of something. There it was, plain as day; but motionless and silent.

One look, and the old mother closed the door with a sudden snap, and hurried up to the fire-place. Scarcely had she cowered there when flying feet were heard outside. They paused at the door. Then a low, guarded tap; then one word echoed inside, gently whispering, "Mother!"

With a glad cry of joy the poor woman sprung to the door and opened it. In another moment she had locked in her arms a wet, fainting form.

"Oh, Dora! Dora! God be thanked; I have you again! But oh! my child, why do you—"

"Sh! 'sh!" said the girl, her large black eyes glancing wildly around her. "'Sh! 'sh! mother, I've been to see the Shadow! And, mother, I've seen him! Clavis, who years ago, mother, said he—" She suddenly paused. "Quick, mother! At the window! For God's sake!" and she pointed her thin hand shudderingly toward the window.

The mother looked.

"The Padroon's wrath!" and she buried her hand on her daughter's shoulders, and drew her wet form closer to her bosom.

The old, withered face at the window had disappeared when she looked again.

CHAPTER VII.

OATH-BOUND.

BUT Agnes Arlington's uplifted arm did not descend. It was suddenly seized from behind, in a powerful grasp, and she heard hissed in her ear:

"Hold! hold! my pretty one! 'Tis dangerous to play with edged tools! Ha! ha! lucky for Sainty I chanced to come in!"

Agnes Arlington turned like a tigress at bay.

"You here, Delaney Howe?" she exclaimed, her voice faltering, and her face blanching with terror.

"Yes, Miss Agnes. 'Tis I, yours to command! And excuse me, Miss Agnes; I'll trouble you to give me that knife. It belongs to your uncle, and as he may not require it again, I think it but just that no one should claim it now. Though I grant 'tis a fine knife, as I saw by your scrutiny that you are pleased with it!"

And his steel-gray eyes fairly seemed to burn her through.

Without a word, Agnes, her face now a dead-white, her eyes staring fixedly on the young man's countenance, turned toward him. She held out the keen-edged knife, and said, in a calm voice:

"I thank God that you came, Delaney Howe! For a frenzy had seized me, and you have saved me from murder!"

Delaney Howe took the dagger in his hands and placed it away, having carefully wrapped its glittering blade in his handkerchief, in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"You are in my power now, Agnes Arlington!" he said, in a harsh voice, "and no one knows it better than myself! You can imagine what course the law would pursue, were it known that you had been, by me, prevented from *murdering*, in cold blood, your own blood uncle!" and he gazed at her fixedly.

The girl shivered. All at once she had seen the terrible position in which a single impulsive moment had placed her.

"Oh! spare me! spare me! I knew not what I was doing!" She reeled and fell backward. But the man caught her in his arms, and carried her swiftly across the room to a sofa on the opposite side. Laying her down gently he stood above her. Slowly she opened her eyes, and, as she saw Delaney Howe standing there, a shiver passed over her frame.

The young man turned away, and going to a side-board, as if he knew the locality well, he drew out a decanter of brandy. Pouring out a small portion in a wine-glass, and adding a little water he went back to the girl.

"Here, Miss Agnes," he said, "drink this; it will give you strength and spirits."

As if obeying him in every particular, she took the glass, swallowed the draught, then suddenly sat up and looked at him.

"You are all right now, Miss Agnes, and," continued Delaney Howe, speaking rapidly, his tone growing harder as he proceeded, "your secret is safe on one condition," and his burning eyes stared her meaningly in the face.

"Shall I tell you the condition?" he continued.

She bowed her head.

"Of course you know, Miss Agnes, that my information would send you to the county jail, and that my testimony would consign you to the penitentiary?"

The girl answered not, but the expression of her face, told well enough the answer he would expect.

"Agnes Arlington, I love you! There, that's flat and plain, though you need not start so. I am poor, I know, but not more so than *you*, and I am young, healthy and strong. You have no beau. You could not do better than—"

"Enough, Delaney Howe! Would you have me say I love you, when I despise you?" and the girl glanced at him with flashing eyes.

"I do not ask you to love me; I don't care for *that*. I want you to *marry* me! *Marry* me—do you understand, girl? And I swear solemnly you shall, or you shall go to jail! Mark that! And now, Agnes Arlington, I give you five minutes to answer," and he fixed his eyes, demon-like on the clock, turning his back to the girl, as he spoke.

The gloomy prison walls rose before her, and her soul shrank with very horror within itself. No, she could not bear that disgrace; and she dared not brave the dagger, or the slow poison.

In a mad, impulsive moment, she turned.

"Spare me, man! Spare my family's name, and I'll be your wife!"

"Swear it! swear it! Agnes Arlington, on the keen blade of this dagger!" exclaimed the young man, drawing out the weapon, and unrolling from it the handkerchief.

The girl drew away with a shudder; but meeting the man's eyes, she turned and seized the knife, and placing the bright blade to her lips, said in a choking voice:

"I swear!"

"'Tis well, Agnes; I'll keep this knife as a reminder, for— Wheels; the doctor has come."

A rap sounded on the outside door of the hall. The summons was answered, and in a few moments the village physician entered the library.

We shall not give the details of the struggle between science and apparent death. Suffice it to say, that after having tried every means, and resorted to almost every method for resuscitation, at the end of an hour St. Clair Arlington opened his eyes and glanced around him. In a half-hour more, he sat up.

The rich man was almost miraculously restored to life, and the physician, with a smile of pleasure on his face, turned to go.

At that instant there was a thundering knock on the door. A servant hurried thither in a moment.

"I've a wounded man, hurt badly! Can't you take him in?" asked a loud voice, outside.

Mr. Arlington, standing by the library-door, answered at once:

"Certainly! Hurry, John, and lend a helping hand. Remain a while, doctor; your services may be needed."

In a few moments, a burly fellow—none other than our friend, the driver—and John, the servant, entered, bearing between them the almost motionless form of a man.

Slowly the men bore him on. And now the light from the hall shone full in his face. The wounded man shivered; his breast heaved; then he opened his eyes, and looked hurriedly around him. His gaze fell on Agnes Arlington, and a wild, convulsive shudder swept through his frame.

With a piercing shriek, the girl tottered forward and flung her arms around him.

And old St. Clair Arlington reeled back into the library, moaning out, in an agonizing voice:

"Clavis Warne! Clavis Warne! Do you come to haunt me?"

And when the wounded man had been lifted out from the carriage, a low voice had wailed plaintively on the air, and a dim figure had flitted away, unperceived, in the shadow of the large house.

CHAPTER VIII.

SWORN AWAY.

LATE that night, long after the wounded man had been placed in bed, by order of the physician, St. Clair Arlington paced up and down the limits of his library.

The rain had long since entirely abated, and the stars were twinkling down brightly from the blue vault.

It was now after twelve o'clock. The house was wrapped in quiet. The wounded stranger, under the influence of an opiate, was sleeping soundly, and Agnes Arlington, her bosom torn by conflicting storms, her young heart crushed to earth, was locked in the privacy of her room.

The physician had closely, though tenderly, examined the arm of him who had sought unwittingly the hospitality of the mansion. This did not consume many minutes. He found that both bones of the fore-arm were broken. Extemporizing a splint, he arranged the limb as well as he could, so as to give the sufferer as much ease and comfort as possible; and then, promising to call again in the morning, with a regular surgical appliance, he administered the opiate and left.

That night, when Agnes Arlington recovered herself—as she had thrown her arms around the insensible form of Clavis Warne—she started to her feet, and turning hastily away, as if to avoid the curious eyes bent upon her, ascended the broad staircase, and sought her own room.

Among those who looked upon her strange display of emotion, were some who knew well enough what occasioned it. One of these was Fanny the maid; another was Delaney Howe. The girl knew well the secret that was preying upon the virgin heart of Agnes, the orphan; and the man was well aware of an old-time tale connecting the disinherited beauty and Clavis Warne, the lawyer. His face had grown very dark when his eyes rested on the pale features of the wounded man; still darker when Agnes Arlington flung herself upon his motionless form.

But, then a grim smile passed over Delaney Howe's dark, forbidding countenance, as turning away into the library, he chuckled low to himself, and muttered:

"It matters not! *I hold her secret!* and she is bound to me! I'll spoil this game!"

Then he had suddenly taken his departure, nobody seeing him, or paying any heed to him.

Slowly St. Clair Arlington strode up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes bent moodily and sternly on the floor. He paused and glanced up at the clock. It was half-past twelve.

Drawing near the large writing-desk, he flung himself into a chair, and leaned his cheek upon his hand.

"'Tis late!" he muttered, "but, I can not sleep; I *know* it is fated that I shall *not* celebrate any occasion in this ghostly old mansion! Ha! I heard something then!" he suddenly exclaimed, springing to his feet, as a loud rap sounded as on the old oak wall of the library, and a low moan echoed distinctly in the room.

The man peered around him, with a frightened face, and thrust his hand in his bosom. He started violently, as he drove his hand down into the breast-pocket of his coat.

Nothing was there!

"The dirk! Where can it be? Have I lost it?" he said, in an anxious voice. "That knife is precious to me; it has served me a good turn more than once!" and he still continued to search his person.

His search, however, was fruitless. Opening his vest he looked through it, and took out a pistol. He gazed at it for a moment. It was a small revolving weapon of a foreign manufacture. The bright caps glistening on the tubes shone plainly in the light.

"There is another shadow on my path! He is here again! Clavis Warne rises up suddenly against me, his shadow falls at my feet, and I see in it *trouble*—*trouble*! Yet, ah, ye gods! he sleeps in *this* house! Under *this* roof! Suppose he should not awake!" and he sunk his voice to a whisper, as he fondled the dangerous weapon lying in his hand.

Rising slowly to his feet, he dropped the pistol in his pocket.

"We'll see! we'll see! He is badly hurt, and must sleep here other nights than this!"

With that he turned again to his promenade up and down the limits of the room.

When Agnes Arlington tottered into her room that night, she sunk exhausted upon a chair. In a moment, Fanny, the warm-hearted maid, entered behind her, and was soon by her side.

"Be of good cheer, Miss Agnes!" she said, in a sympathizing voice. "Do not give way now, for you should be happy."

"Happy, Fanny! Oh! Fanny, you mock me! I am wild! Would that that lightning stroke had laid me dead!" and the poor girl leaned her head down on her hands, as sob after sob burst from her agonized bosom. The servant looked on with wonder and pity.

"Why, Miss Agnes, Mr. Warne is not hurt much. He is young, and is strong again, even now. He will soon be well, and then, Miss Agnes, he will take you out of this house. Heaven has sent him here, Miss Agnes, and I know the young man loves you still, for—"

"Enough! enough! Fanny; you will craze me! Oh, that I should live to see this day! All things conspire against me! and I can not escape destiny!"

"There, there, Miss Agnes," said the girl, soothingly. "Calm yourself. There is everything to hope for now. Mr. Warne does not care for money. He has enough, and, as I said, he will take you from this now hateful home, and—"

"Hush, Fanny! You know not my terrible secret! You know not the throbbings of my breaking heart! 'Tis true, Clavis has come again; 'tis true it looks as if providence had flung him hither; 'tis true he loves me as of old, for I feel it; 'tis true my very soul yearns for him, as it did in the past, and has done, for four long years of woe and misery to me! But, Fanny, a wall is between us, for, Fanny, I must tell you—bend your ear close—closer still! I can not now love Clavis, for I have sworn to wed another!"

The maid started back in amazement. Her words were scarcely audible as she said:

"Sworn to wed another? And who—who?"

"DELANEY HOWE!" was the wailing answer, as Agnes Arlington, with a low cry, slid from her chair in a swoon to the floor.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT IN THE MANOR.

ST. CLAIR ARLINGTON spoke not a word for several moments, but continued striding moodily up and down the room, his head bent, his eyes staring fixedly before him.

"Twice before," he muttered, glancing around him as he spoke, "have I heard that strange rap and the sad moan. Can it be jugglery? Can any one about the house know my secret, and attempt thus to— Ha! He here again!" he suddenly exclaimed, as a decided rap sounded just then on the rear door of the library, looking out.

Mr. Arlington stepped forward at once, and turned the key. Instantly the door was hurled rudely open, and Delaney Howe, with a white, haggard face, staggered into the room.

"I've seen it! I've seen it again, Sainty!" he said, in a trembling voice, as, shutting the door quickly, he hastened into the room, and sunk, nervously, into a chair.

"Seen what? Can't you speak?" asked Mr. Arlington, rudely staring at the other.

"THE SHADOW! THE SHADOW!" was the trembling reply.

"The Shadow! and at this time of night!" exclaimed the rich man, cowering away himself.

"Why, Delaney, it is nearly one o'clock!"

"But I tell you I saw it, just as I did before!" was the hasty reply.

"At the same place—you know where, Sainty."

Several moments passed without either of the men speaking. But, at length, the silence was broken by Delaney Howe.

"You see, Sainty," he said, his voice now calm and steady, "I had almost reached home, when, all at once, I remembered that I had forgotten *something* here," and he looked the other straight in the face.

"I was returning for what I had forgotten, when, in crossing that confounded plain out there, I saw that infernal Shadow! I came back, Sainty, for the pewter—the gold—old boy! I could not get along without it, you know," and he leered in the rich man's face.

Mr. Arlington frowned for a moment, but only for a moment. It was evident he had something brooding upon his mind about which he wished to speak.

"You shall have it, Delaney, of course; but not at such dictation. I must give willingly, or not at all."

"Willingly, is it, Sainty? Why, my good fellow, my hand is upon your throat, do you see?" and he glared at the other.

For an instant the hot flush of a resenting anger mantled the cheek of the rich man. But by an effort he controlled himself.

"Very true, Delaney; but, remember, my friend," and his voice sunk to a hissing whisper, "and do not forget, that I have a hold upon you—that you are in the meshes, and—"

"Nonsense, nonsense! Sainty; you are talking idly!" interrupted the young man. "If you feel inclined to try your *power* against mine, walk over to the village to-morrow, and make the effort! I will do the same; but now I would advise you to get that money."

Arlington did not reply; but turned at once, and disappeared behind the book-case by the west window.

Delaney Howe was sitting by the secretary. As soon as Arlington was hid from view, the young man quickly, but softly, raised the lid of the desk, and peered in for a second. Then, reaching his hand inside, he cautiously drew out a long, thin memorandum-book, and pushed it out of sight under his vest. Then he gently lowered the top of the desk to its place.

Mr. Arlington soon returned. In one hand he carried a bag; in the other a bundle of notes. He cast both on the secretary—the bag in its fall giving forth a sharp metallic ring.

"There are five hundred dollars there, Delaney; four hundred in notes, one hundred in gold. Take it, and do not bother me again soon."

"Bothers you, does it? Well, I wouldn't wonder if it did! It *bothers* me to come for it! But, I will count it, Sainty; you may have made a mistake, you know. All of us are liable to err, especially in counting money!"

Delaney leisurely drew the money toward him, and commenced to count it.

Arlington looked on with a frown, but he opened not his mouth.

"'Tis all right, Sainty," at length said Howe, as he proceeded to secure the money about his person, "and thank you for the tin! But, you were saying

you had something to talk about. I am not sleepy, and you can drive ahead if you feel like it, and settling himself comfortably back in his chair, he looked inquiringly at the other.

Mr. Arlington drawing his chair close to the other one, said:

"You know we have a guest in this house, Delaney?"

"Yes; that is, I thought so, and may the devil take Clavis Warne!" was the vehement reply.

"Then you do not like him? Perhaps you know something of the young lawyer?"

"Know him? I should think so! He it was who first stood between me and Agnes Arlington!"

"I think I heard something of the fellow's old love-scape with my niece!" and Mr. Arlington's eyes flashed behind the glittering glasses.

The scar on Delaney Howe's forehead was now as red as crimson, always a token with him of deep feeling, of joy or anger.

"Yes," he continued; "Clavis Warne, then a visitor at this house on law business, first turned Agnes Arlington's heart from me. Then I had money, and her old father did not dislike me. Clavis Warne came; and *he*, too, had money. More than that, he had an oily tongue, and—I can not deny it—a handsome face and figure. Then Agnes turned away from me!"

"Do you think she *ever* cared for you?" asked Mr. Arlington, with a slight sneer.

Howe's brow contracted fearfully at the question. He bit his lip, but said, quietly:

"No, she never did, confound her! But her old father cared for me, because, *then*, we had gold! Old John Arlington—"

"Leave *him* out, leave *him* out!" said the rich man, hastily.

"As I was saying, Delaney, you do not like Clavis Warne. Neither do I!"

"You? Why, you never saw him before to-night?" and Howe looked sharply at the other.

"Yes, I *have* seen him before. 'Tis a long tale, Delaney, and I can not tell it now. But, it chanced that while traveling abroad several years ago, I met Clavis Warne. On one occasion we had some words and I owe him a grudge, which I would be glad to settle with *him*," and he gazed at the young man significantly.

Delaney started, and a singular, knowing expression came over his face. His cold gray eyes glittered as he said, in a low tone:

"I begin to understand you, Sainty! The old trick, eh? But he is a guest under your roof!"

Arlington did not reply to this; he simply said:

"Clavis Warne lives in Albany now, and he comes here *on business*, depend upon it!"

"He comes to stay a year, I should judge by the size of his trunk!" said Howe. "But, what business, Sainty?"

"You know he is a lawyer, I suppose? He has a great reputation for untangling *knotty estate questions*, and *securing property to rightful heirs*."

"Ah! I understand! Yes, yes! And he may have been called hither for some such work!"

"You have it!" said Arlington, fiercely. "He sleeps under this roof to night, and to-morrow night certainly. Chloroform tied over the nose, or a thumb pressed on the wind-pipe, are procedures generally followed by serious consequences! Besides that, there is a danger of *shock*, as the surgeons call it."

The other did not answer.

"Moreover, my friend," continued the rich man, his mouth at the ear of the other, "one thousand dollars is a nice pile of money for *looking on* and *lending a hand*!"

"I understand you, Sainty! You are a bold fellow, and we'll talk a little over this matter," was the answer.

CHAPTER X.

GOLD AND STEEL.

THE conversation between St. Clair Arlington and his friend continued until the clock pointed to half-past two, then Arlington arose.

"Well, Delaney," he said, in a satisfied voice, "it is all managed, and— You see the clock; it is late. As you live a mile or so from here, I think—"

"Spare yourself the trouble of *thinking anything* on my account, Sainty. I'll just turn in here for the night."

Arlington stared. "Sleep on the sofa?"

"Yes, sleep on the sofa! You see, Sainty, I've done the same thing before, on several occasions, and then, that confounded plain! I will not cross it again this night—not if I know myself!"

"Of course, Delaney, I've no objection; but, as we will not see one another to-morrow morning—for, *of course*, you will go early—I'll just say, now, we'll consider that matter as settled, and you know when will be the time."

As he spoke, he stepped to his secretary, locked it, and placing the key in his pocket, bade the other "Good-night," and retired softly.

He did not seek at once his own almost royal sleeping-apartment, but, ascending the stairs to the second story, he paused for a moment in the dim-lit passageway. One single taper was shedding its beams over this hall, throwing every thing below it in a gloomy shade.

Arlington stood some minutes and listened intently; but no sound came to his ears. Then, cautiously creeping forward, he turned into another passageway, and, at a few steps, stood before a door. He paused, as he saw a faint light gleaming through the key-hole. He scarcely breathed as he leaned his head down, and listened.

Muffled sounds as of sobs, and soothing, sympathizing words echoed faintly from the apartment. But the words were not distinguishable. Treading like a cat, he drew away from the door, and, once out of ear-shot, hurried away to the further end of the passage.

"Confound her, she is up yet! Broken-hearted, of course! And her comforter is—the *maid*! Well, in a day or so, perhaps, she will be more inconsolable than now! We'll see! But now I must reconnoiter!"

So saying, he turned to an open window and placed his hands upon the sill; then, having looked cautiously around him, and listened well for some minutes, he sprang lightly outside.

Running entirely around this portion of the old mansion—the portion being the wings, before referred to—was an old rickety porch, beaten and decayed by many rains and snows. In former times these porches were always resorted to by the family and guests, to enjoy the cool breeze playing over the wide plain, in the hot evenings of summer. But, for many years they had been but little used, and had gone to decay, and the present owner of the old mansion had not seen fit to have them repaired.

He paused not now; but hurried around the house to the front, closely hugging the old weather boarding, as if he feared to trust his weight out further.

Suddenly he came to a window. One of the shutters was thrown open. A light inside was burning dimly. Through the open shutter and through the upraised window, the dying moon, far over and just above the tops of the trees, shed askant its mellow radiance full into the room.

Arlington started at the sight revealed; he raised his hand to his eyes and peered in.

Lying on the bed, directly in the splendor of the moon's rays—his pale, half-ern, half-sweet, intellectual face showing with a deathlike luster, was Clavis Warne, the stranger. There he lay, sleeping soundly, his bandaged arm lying on the pillow, as the surgeon had arranged it.

For several moments the rich man gazed on the face of the sleeper; and, as he gazed, his eyes grew stony; a scowl swept over his features.

"Here he lies!" he muttered—"he who holds my other secret! He who laid his hand upon my collar and would have dragged me away to the tribunal! And here he is now, sleeping under *my* roof! and to-morrow he will know me as the brother of old John Arlington, and not as— No, 'tis nothing! Yes, he will know me as the uncle of Agnes, the woman of his heart! Will he *dare* to breathe what he knows? The thought crazes me! Thus will I end my suspense, and none will ever know who did the deed."

In the twinkling of an eye, he drew from his bosom the revolving pistol, threw back the hammer and extended his arm. His eyes were flashing down the barrel, and his finger was pressing the trigger.

At that instant a deep groan echoed on the air, seeming to come from Arlington's very elbow. With a cry of terror, he turned and fled like lightning around the house.

And then a short, bent figure sprang nimbly through the open window, and, in a moment, stood by the side of Clavis Warne, who still slumbered soundly on.

When Arlington, after locking his secretary, had left the room—the library, as will be remembered—Delaney Howe sat still for a moment, gazing vacantly at the door through which his host had just passed. Gradually a scornful smile spread over his face.

"He was too late!" muttered the young man, tapping lightly on the memorandum-book, concealed under his waistcoat. "There is no need to lock his desk now. At last I am possessor of that I have long coveted. I know that the *scrap* was taken from this book!"

As he spoke, he placed his hand under his vest, and drew out the memorandum-book. Opening it, he hastily examined the leaves. On the leaf before him were a few written words, and then, just below, was a large, square hole. The leaf had been—or a portion of it—cut out.

Delaney Howe scrutinized the writing and the orifice. At length, with a low chuckle, he said:

"So much for old John Arlington's will! But now, I must try and sleep. I must see the 'Brothers' to-morrow, for there may be work elsewhere."

He approached the door, locked it, then extinguished all the tapers but one, threw aside his coat, and flung himself upon the sofa.

A half-hour passed; then the man's deep breathing showed that he was in sound slumber. Suddenly a large shadow appeared on the floor of the library. Then a dark, misshapen figure stole with cautious steps from behind the row of shelving to the east, and stepping forward it bent over the sleeper, while the pale light of the taper caught and reflected the glitter of steel.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE SECRETS THAN ONE.

For several moments, the low, dark figure leaned over the unconscious sleeper, then cautiously, the vest, which concealed the purloined memorandum-book, was unbuttoned, and the book slowly drawn out.

In a moment, the man noiselessly turned the bolt, went out into the dimly-lit hall. Silently he ascended the stairs, and followed in the footsteps of St. Clair Arlington to the open window, through which the other had sprung out on the porch.

The face lighted up by the pale rays was that of an old man, withered and haggard, a wild fire gleaming from his eyes.

He it was who stood by the bedside of Clavis Warne, and looked upon his sleeping, marble-like face.

"Ha!" he muttered; "it is he! He has heeded the warning, and has come at last!"

The strange old creature then turned and disappeared in the gloom of the apartment.

Clavis Warne moved uneasily in his sleep; he pressed upon his wounded arm. With a half-groan, he opened his eyes. He was half-stupefied, and at first knew not where he was. But, gradually his consciousness returned to him; he remembered everything, and uttered a deep sigh.

At that moment Clavis Warne started so suddenly that he disarranged the dressings from his arm, causing him much pain, and he sunk back on his pillow with a groan. But he distinctly saw through his half-closed eyes the figure of an old man, bent and decrepit, shamble toward the open window, and then he was gone.

Clavis Warne slept no more that eventful night. The dawn broke, and his eyes were still wide open; and his cheek was flushed with fever.

At an early hour Delaney Howe aroused himself. He started to his feet. He felt in his bosom. His vest was open! The book was gone!

He stepped to the door and tried it. It was unlocked; yet he was *certain*, that before lying down he had locked it. A frown gathered upon his face, a venomous fire shot from his eyes.

"You saw me, *Sainty*! And you have paid me back, have you? We'll see, we'll see, my cove, for I have the knife yet!"

With this, he walked to the rear door, cautiously opened it, and went out in the gray gloom of the early dawn.

The sun, shining red and warm, was just breaking in the East, when he rapped gently on the door of his mother's humble dwelling, by the cemetery.

When the village doctor came that morning, and had looked upon his patient, he shook his head. The dressings were almost off, and the arm was feverish and swollen.

"You have not slept well, my dear sir," he said. "Yet the opiate was powerful and given in a large quantity. You must be careful, sir, or erysipelas will supervene."

Clavis Warne thanked the physician for his kindness, and submitted himself again to his manipulations.

The operation of dressing and splinting the wounded arm was tedious, and to the patient excessively painful. But when it was over he expressed himself as feeling better.

Then the physician, telling him he might dress and sit up, though enjoining him to remain in his room, bade him good-morning, and left.

The young man had been duly served with a nice breakfast, but his host had not made his appearance.

About ten o'clock that day, however, there was a knock on the door. Before the young man could say "Come in," St. Clair Arlington, stern and pale, walked into the room, his eyes glittering behind the flashing glasses. He quickly closed the door and turned toward his guest.

"Do you not know me, Clavis Warne?" he asked, in a low, trembling voice, gazing straight at the other.

The young man started violently, and, half-shrinking away from his host, exclaimed:

"Then it was *not* a dream! Yes, I do know you, Ralph Thornton, for a cheat, and a mur—"

"Take care, or, by heavens, I'll—" Without finishing the sentence, he strode menacingly toward the other.

"Stand back, Ralph Thornton, or I'll shoot you like a dog, as you deserve!" and the young man, with his unwounded hand, suddenly drew a pistol from his bosom. His eyes were flashing, and there was a fearful sternness about his pale, calm face.

The other recoiled; his own face grew paler than ever, and he clutched at a chair for support.

"I once *suore*, Ralph Thornton," continued the young man, "to be even with you! God has ordered it, and I now, before high Heaven, renew my vow! I shall never forget that fatal night, when your vengeful knife—"

"Hold! hold! Clavis Warne! I beg you! Do not kill me afresh with your words! Have I not suffered the tortures of the damned? Have I not ever seen a black shape at my elbow? Come, come, Clavis Warne; I am here to talk with you. You know me not; I am not Ralph Thornton, but St. Clair Arlington, the uncle of her whom you in old times loved—of AGNES!"

"The uncle of Agnes Arlington! Alas! alas!" and thrusting his pistol back in his pocket, he reeled and tottered into his chair.

For a moment there was silence, and the young man leaned his head low down, while his eyes were fixed upon the sun-shadows on the carpet.

"Yes, Clavis Warne, I am the uncle of Agnes Arlington, and I came to speak with you, to beg you, for her sake, to keep my secret! I acted in self-defense! I—"

"Bah, man! Don't add falsification to your double crime! Do not attempt to impose upon me! I know you to be a villain of the deepest dye, and, and—Ha! Resent it if you choose; and I'll shoot you dead on the spot!" and again he felt for his pistol, as St. Clair Arlington suddenly strode forward when the ringing words of Clavis Warne fell upon his ear.

But the rich man paused before the frowning muzzle of the pistol.

"I meant nothing! But, Clavis Warne, I am but flesh and blood! Put up your pistol, and I will tell you a tale, and then will plead with you again!"

Without speaking the invalid bowed to the other to proceed.

A long, earnest conversation, carried on in a low breath, ensued between the two. At the expiration of an hour Clavis Warne, after a short pause said as if to end the conversation:

"For Agnes's sake, Mr. Arlington, I will spare you. But, mark me! I will watch you. Be warned, for I have registered a vow against you! You can take up the gauntlet, if you wish! And now, by necessity, I am forced to remain under your roof this day and to-night; but, if I can stand upon my feet in the morning, I shall leave for the village. Good-morning, sir."

As St. Clair Arlington strode out into the hall; a grim smile spread over his face. Hurrying downstairs, he entered his library and closed the door.

"It is settled! and he has fixed his doom! Before to-morrow's sun will rise we'll be square, Clavis Warne! Old scores will be settled; and then we will see about the vow! He knows not the man he deals with! Look to yourself, Clavis Warne! and leave others to manage their own affairs!"

As he thus spoke he placed his hand in his vest-pocket, and drew out a key. Then he approached the secretary. He unlocked it, and without looking into it, placed his hand down to a familiar corner of the drawer.

Arlington started. Hurling the top of the desk violently back, he leaned down and gazed in. His face blanched.

What he sought was not there!

"Gone! gone!" he muttered. "My SECRET taken from me! And Delaney Howe slept here last night! I'll wring it from him!"

He snatched his hat, and hurrying out strode away over the plain.

Agnes Arlington, her face pale and care-worn, her eyes starting before her, drew from behind a book-case, and hastened from the room.

"Murder is on the air!" she muttered, as she disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

DELANEY HOWE'S NEWS.

ALTHOUGH it was a very early hour that morning when Delaney Howe rapped on the door of his mother's little home, yet there was an ear inside the humble abode which had always heard his step, and a glad sunlight seemed to stream over the old woman's face, as she hurried to let him in.

"God be thanked, my son, that you are home at last! What has kept you away from your poor old mother, Delaney?" and she released her arms around his neck to allow him to enter.

Delaney Howe's greeting with his aged mother was warm and affectionate—far more so than one would expect from the character of the man as we know him. He drew her tenderly to his bosom, and kissed her cheek several times, as she gave way for him to pass.

He started, and trod more softly when he glanced at the bed, in the further corner of the room, and saw, quietly sleeping upon it, his poor crazy sister, Dora.

"I am glad she has come, mother," he said in a low tone. "Last night was her night, you know, and what a fearful storm raged. It was a bad night for her, poor thing, to be abroad in, mother."

"Yes, my son, and when she came in she was soaking wet," replied the mother! then gazing anxiously at the sweet face of the sleeper, upon which there rested the faintest tinge of an expression of pain, she continued: "and, Delaney, she breathes heavily, and her hands are hot."

The young man, hurrying over to her bedside, laid his hand softly upon her hot wrist. He started as he felt the thrilling artery.

"Dora is very ill mother," he said, in an excited, half-subdued voice. "I will go over to the village, and summon the doctor. She must be attended to."

He spoke very earnestly. The old mother started.

"Do you think she is very ill, Delaney?" and she looked him earnestly in the face.

"She is, mother. The storm was violent, and as ever, she wore a very thin dress. She has taken cold. I saw her myself, last night."

"You, Delaney? and where?"

"At Mr. Arlington's mansion," was the reply.

Delaney Howe started, as he had replied so promptly; but he could not now correct his slip of tongue.

The old mother cast her eyes down, and a frown came upon her face.

She looked up. "I don't like that man, my son; I don't like St. Clair Arlington!" she said, in a low, calm voice.

Delaney Howe frowned. "And why not, mother?" he asked, without looking at her in the face.

"Because, Delaney, there's something wrong about him! You may not know it, for you were a child then, but I know that, from a boy, he never had a good name. His old brother, John, now dead and gone, despised him. And old John would groan in his grave if he knew that the reckless, flashy, deceitful St. Clair governed the old mansion. Be warned, my son, of this man. He handles too much money for such as you to associate with him," and the old woman laid her withered hand upon her son's shoulder.

The old woman looked upon him kindly, and her eyes beamed with affection as they fell upon his face and his brawny frame.

"You will take it kindly, my son, what your old mother has to say to you. She has seen a great deal of the world, and, in some things, she has, perhaps, more experience than you. St. Clair Arlington was a bad man in his youth, squandered what patrimony he had, and his name was connected with some dark transactions, which some people called crimes. He quarreled with his old brother—a stingy, miserly man, I admit, but an honest man—and then he left the country. When he came back no one knows; but he did return here one month after the death, or disappearance, of old John. And then, finding that piece of paper, and all at once getting possession of old John's property, and leaving poor Agnes out in the cold. I tell you, Delaney, there are more people than your old mother who think very strange of this. They surmise that all is not right, and others hint right out that—"

"What the deuce does all this stuff mean, mother?" suddenly and half-rudely asked the young man, starting from his seat, and gazing with an angry frown at his mother.

The old woman cowered away and bent her gaze meekly on the cold, bare boards of the floor. But she recovered herself.

"It means, my son," she said, firmly, at the same time raising her dim old eyes lovingly upon her first-born, "it means that many people still think that St. Clair Arlington is a bad man—that he has come into this property of his brother by some underhanded means, and, as a mother, my boy, a fond, and affectionate mother, as God knows I am, I must warn you of that man! I know that you are often at the mansion: I know, too, that you are often with him. Now, Delaney, you are a poor man; Mr. Arlington is a rich one—if, indeed, he even got a third of old John's earnings. It will ruin you to stay with such a man, and—"

"Enough, mother! I am tired of such talk. Remember I have been a man for many years, and—"

"I cannot forget, my dear child, that you are my son, however old you are," interrupted the old woman, in a faltering tone, and her eyes all the time beaming with a mother's love upon him.

Delaney Howe's face flushed; a shade of pain, of regret, passed over his forehead. Stopping suddenly, as a tear came to his eye, he kissed her cheek gently, and said, in a low voice:

"Forgive me, mother! God knows I value and return your earnest affection. But you judge Mr. Arlington harshly. He may *have been* all you say, but, that is no reason he is so *now*. And, because I told you I saw Dora in the mansion last night, does not go to show that I have been nowhere else."

"Well, Delaney, if it is proper for your old mother to know it, *where* have you been during the night?" and she gazed him searchingly in the face.

The young man almost trembled at the words; his face wrinkled into an angry frown, and he bit his lip. But he felt the old mother's eye upon him, and he could not escape her question. So he answered:

"I have been upon my own business, and that is enough for you to know."

The old woman's frame shook at the cruel answer; silent tears trickled down her cheek, and fell upon her clean, white apron.

The young man saw the effect of his words, and stooping down, he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and said, in a kinder tone:

"There, mother, I meant not to hurt your feelings. But, I think it is a little hard that you should lecture me so often about matters you do not know as much about as you think you do, and especially is this unnecessary when, wherever I am, I am working for you as well as for myself! See, mother, what I have brought you!"

As he spoke, he suddenly drew from his pocket a handful of gold coins. He laid them in her lap without a word.

The old woman's face paled.

"Pure gold! More gold, Delaney? And you out of work! Whence comes this wealth, my son? Oh! tell your old mother, is this gold *honestly yours*?"

"*Honestly mine*? That's good, mother, especially coming from you!" and he laughed a bitter laugh.

But, do what he could, and laugh as he did, there was a moment, just then when a deadly pallor rushed like a whirlwind over Delaney's face. Turning, however, toward the mantle, to hide his emotion, his old mother saw it not.

"Well, well, Delaney," she said, in a satisfied and gentle tone. "If the money is honestly come by—and I can not think otherwise—why, my dear boy, I will take it, and may God bless you for it."

She transferred the coin at once to a bag, and hid it away in an old trunk, which she drew from beneath the bed, upon which the poor mad girl was sleeping so quietly.

Delaney walked gently up and down the limits of the small room. His mother, without awakening the sleeping girl, pushed the old trunk back under the bed, and turned to the fire, to superintend the cooking.

Suddenly the young man paused and said:

"Mother, I have something to tell you—a little secret," and a grim smile passed over his face, as he muttered the words.

"A secret, my son?" and the old woman, turning from the fire, confronted her boy, surprise and curiosity depicted upon her face.

"Yes, mother, and a weighty secret—a piece of startling news! It is: *Agnes Arlington has promised to be my wife!*" He spoke very quietly, and watched the effect of his words upon his mother.

The old woman started, as if struck by a thunderbolt.

"What!" she exclaimed. "Agnes Arlington promised to be your wife?"

"Ay, mother! More than that! she *swore* she would be!" and, as he emphasized the word, a horrible leer swept over his face. But the old mother did not see it.

"Why, Delaney," she said, in a low, trembling voice, "you astound me! I knew that you always had a kind of longing for the girl. But I thought that had passed away, when our money was lost to us. I did not think that now, when we were poor, you dare lift your eyes to Agnes."

"And why not, mother?" he asked, almost fiercely. "Agnes Arlington is as poor—nay, poorer—than I am!"

"Then, how could you wed such a girl? though, Delaney, she is a noble girl!"

"Why, I'll make her uncle endow her," was the reply.

The widow started.

"Make him, my son?"

At that moment heavy steps were heard approaching, and then, as they paused before the little house, a loud rap sounded on the panel.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RAP AT CLAVIS WARNE'S DOOR.

WHEN St. Clair Arlington had left the room that morning, in which his guest, Clavis Warne, was domiciled, the young man sat still for many minutes. An anxious shade of thought was upon his brow, and a dark foreboding frown was on his handsome face.

Clavis Warne was handsome, both in face and figure. In the latter he was tall—certainly above the medium height—rather spare, very erect, with a thin flank, and a good spread of shoulders, indicating at once physical endurance and muscular power. His face was an open one. He wore no beard or whiskers, but a deep-brown mustache swept down over his mouth, concealing that organ entirely from view. He had a square jaw, and a rounded, prominent chin, both expressing strong will and determination. His eyes were large, melancholy and pensive, and of a dark-brown or hazel color. The brow was broad, prominent and massive, and was shaded by a heavy mass of curling chestnut hair.

Several minutes after Mr. Arlington had gone, the unwilling guest remained in his seat, looking intently upon the floor. The anxious expression deepened, and the scowl on his brow grew darker and more anxious, as the moments sped by.

Clavis Warne was thinking of things long ago; he was recalling the time when last he stood in this proud, old-time mansion. He was thinking of that night when he had journeyed from his native home to that little country village of Labberton—journeyed there, pursuing the *ignis fatuus* which led him on—journeyed, following the star of his heart's devotion—that star then glimmering so resplendently in the clear sky that bended above him! He was thinking of that night of the village ball—he at that time just graduated, a fledgling in the law—that night,

when, all aglow with a great triumph, and a trusting love in his heart—he entered the hall-room with the belle of Ladberton on his arm—the blushing Agnes Arlington, the only daughter and child of old John, the miser! He was thinking of the scene next morning at the mansion—of the dark frown on old John Arlington's face—of the hard words he had spoken—and how he, the student, in the conscious dignity of manhood, had retorted, word for word. Then, the door—slammed rudely in his face—then his altercation with young Delaney Howe as he turned indignant, yet sorrowful, from the house—Delaney Howe, then the son of rich parents, and living in the village in one of the grandest mansions there! He was thinking of his last—a stolen interview with Agnes, under the shadow of one of the Lombardy poplars, on the plain—a dark cloud above in the heavy atmosphere—a darker cloud in his bosom. He was thinking of the faith there pledged—of the virgin kiss given—of the heart-breaking farewells—of his departure for a distant city.

Then the shade of Clavis Warne's face grew very dark, and with it mingled an expression of sorrow and pain. The form of a sweet, beautiful girl rose before him. He thought of his admiration of her splendid face and figure—her noble, trusting heart—his fascination! Then of the sad discovery that she loved him. But then came at once his return to fidelity, and the final scene between him and her, that wondrously fair creature! And Clavis Warne groaned in spirit as the memory of an old report, coming to his ears, in the dead days of the past, flashed through his brain again—that report, that madness had de-throned reason in that fascinating beauty—that Dora Howe was a maniac!

The young man shuddered, and a sigh came up from his oppressed breast. After months and years of wanderings in old lands—after loitering and studying by turns in the great cities of another hemisphere—he found himself in this ancient mansion again—the house of Agnes Arlington, and *she* under the same roof with him—for he had seen her in that brief moment of consciousness, on the night before. He was here in Ladberton, the home, or what was formerly the home, of Dora Howe, the beautiful! And he, here on business—that business, undefined, mysterious—and he, as yet, *unacquainted with it*, but, weighty nevertheless, for he *felt* it to be such.

Destiny had beckoned him hither, and almost mechanically he had followed.

As these thoughts rushed through his mind, along with a thousand others, the young man suddenly placed his unwounded hand in a side pocket of his coat and drew out a package of three letters. Aided by his teeth, he opened the package, and casting only a glance at two of the communications, he took out the third. Carefully he opened it, as well as he could, and his eyes seemed to burn down into the sheet.

At that instant, a faint yet decided rap sounded on his door, as the bolt, at the same instant, was turned.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LEAF FROM AN OLD BOOK.

A young man snugly wrapped up in his overcoat hurried along the dark street. There was a stern yet sad frown upon his face, and his eyes were cast upon the pavement before him.

The wind was blowing fresh and chill from the north-west, and falling snow was commencing to whiten the streets of the great city of New York. The hour was about eight in the evening; the night, that following a cold and blustering day in December, 185—.

The young man had just left the mansion, on Fourteenth street, which was flashing its many lights out in the night, and which bore upon its heavy walnut double-door a plate, indicating that it was a certain fashionable "Seminary for Young Ladies."

There was a wild storm in his heart, or his face was no index to his soul.

He hurried on.

"What have I done!" he muttered, in a deep, agonizing voice, "what have I done? And she, poor, innocent, loving girl, *worships* me! Ah, I have done *wrong*—a monstrous wrong; unwittingly have I been ensnared. I have followed blindly a glaring light which has led me to the verge of self-ruin! Have I, even now, drawn back in time to avert the sad, the *fearful* consequences? I do *not* love her! No, no; when I search my heart, there is only one answer—I do *not* love Dora Howe! But, I do love, with my heart's warmest pulsings, my plighted Agnes! Yet Dora *loves me*! Alas! the wretch that I am! and I have given her to understand that she was not indifferent to me! I have just left her, with strange words on my lips—words strange to her—words harsh and cruel! I see her white, scared face now, and I feel that her shadow is by my side!"

As he spoke he shuddered, and glancing around him, drew his overcoat more closely about him, and strode on faster than ever, through the falling snow.

We will return for a moment to that fashionable seminary on Fourteenth street.

In one of the parlors next the street—that parlor lit by a single light from the chandelier—cowering away on a sofa was the bent form of a young girl. She was clad in all the elegance and richness that taste could dictate, and money could purchase.

Suddenly she raised her pale face, red with weeping and sat up. She glanced around her. There were none others in the room.

The maiden could not have been more than eighteen years of age. She was evidently tall and slender, though possessing a sylph-like grace and airiness, which was perceptible at a glance.

Again she shuddered, as she looked about her; and as a deep sob broke from her lips, she closed her eyes and leaned back on the sofa. A marble pallor spread over her face; the rich, red blood, lately flowing there, fled wildly away, and the soft, tremulous hands fell lifelessly by her side.

Dora Howe, stricken in heart, crushed to the earth, her young love flying away, had swooned.

She had been dreaming a sweet, delicious dream for several months—had already builded up a happy future for herself, and had laid awake night after night, and had spent day after day in rearing fairy castles of wondrous beauty in the airy cloud lands above her; she, to occupy those aerial *chateaux* along with another—with him whom she loved with her woman's truest devotion—with him for whom her young heart had gone out—for him, upon whose words she had hung—for him whose smile had ever and often gladdened her heart—for him for whom she would have died—for "CLAVIS WARNE!"

And on this night he had told her a fearful secret, and he had showed her a locket bearing a face other than hers, yet a face she knew—the face of one dear to her; that night, as he held her hand softly in his—while he looked into her eyes, his and hers filled with down-dropping tears, he had told her that his heart and hand were pledged to another! And then she had gone.

Slowly the maiden opened her eyes and glanced around her; the warm blood came to her face; a shiver passed over her, and then she arose to her feet.

A large alabaster clock was ticking upon the mantle. The hands pointed to half-past eight. Dora Howe's eyes flashed over the dial-plate for a second, and then she turned and walked with tottering steps to the window. She placed her white, haggard face to the pane and peered out.

The cold wind crept silently through the sash-joints, and struck her fainting form. She shivered and shrunk half-away; but again gazed out through the filmy glass.

The snow was falling fast, and pedestrians, few in number, wrapt snugly in overcoats and furs, hurried rapidly along. Now and then, a hack rolled by, its rattle and creak half-muffled and deadened by the snow upon the rough stones. Now and then,

too, a policeman, thrashing his arms around him to start his chilled blood, hastened by on his accustomed rounds.

These were all the moving objects which the girl saw, as she peered out into the falling snow.

Ten minutes passed, and then Dora Howe stepped back from the window, allowing the lace curtain to fall again to its accustomed place. And again she glanced at the clock.

"I am determined!" she muttered, and her eyes were stony and fixed, and her step firm. "I'll follow him, nay, I'll not reproach him, for I love him too much, and he has been honest with me! But I will wait for him, and beg him, pray to him to—*to continue to love me!* Oh, God! I cannot give him up! I cannot! It may be unmaidenly—it may be *criminal*, but I can not help it! What is the world to me without him? Oh, why was it ordained that I should meet him? Why was it that I was—born? But time flies! The scholars think *he* is here yet. It is well they do, for I can get away unperceived. What care I for orders or regulations? Is not my heart riven, and torn, and—yes, I *must* see him! I would *die* did I not?"

She cautiously drew near the door opening into the hallway, and looked out. The light had some time since been lit. The girl's heart bounded with joy, for on the hat-rack was hung a shawl.

In a moment she stole out, and snatching the shawl, cast it over head and shoulders, and opening the street door softly, crept out. Down the tall steps she bounded, caring not for the thin shoes which covered her feet, naught for the wild north-wind, naught for the falling snow!

And she had disappeared in the gray gloom of the winter night.

Clavis Warne hurried on, and at length reached his rooms in Irving Place. He placed a key in the lock, and in a moment stood within. Lighting the gas, he flung off his overcoat, hat and gloves, and then, without resting, he commenced to promenade the limits of the apartment.

Suddenly he paused, a shade of relief, as if he had fallen upon some resolve, passing over his features.

"I'll do it! What can I do better? Why shall I remain here longer? Why *linger in the country?* This sad affair but fixes me in a resolution half-formed months ago! I cannot marry Agnes—owing to her father's unbending will, nay, unfounded prejudice—though we have plighted our love. God knows when the time *will* come that I can claim her as my own sweet wife! Then, why need I stay here? Oh, God! that I have been so blindly, so foolishly led away for a time! And now I am meeting with my punishment! Yet, yet, poor Dora! poor Dora! She, too, suffers; suffers more, alas, than I do! God pity her! But I'll pack my trunk *now*, and—and—*to-morrow the Persia sails!* 'Tis well! I am resolved—and and—poor Dora—poor, dear, sweet Agnes!"

So muttering, he approached a closet, and in a moment drew from it a large trunk. Throwing back the top, he proceeded to examine the contents, taking out article by article.

At length he had finished, and then he arose to his feet, and turned toward a bureau in the room.

At that moment hasty feet echoed outside; then they paused at the young man's door; then the bell jingled.

Clavis Warne stepped hastily to the door and opened it. Dora Howe stumbled into the room, and sunk in a chair, breathing heavily.

"My God, Dora!" exclaimed the young man hastening to her side. "What does this mean?" and he took her hand, so cold and purple, in his. The maiden did not withdraw that hand, but looking up in his face, while a warm love-light flashed over him, said, in a broken, anguished voice:

"I could not stay away, Clavis! I longed to see you again, to look upon you once more, or, Clavis, I would go wild! Dear—dear Clavis!"

With a bursting heart the young man turned

away, letting fall the small cold hand. He could not speak.

"Oh, Clavis, do not leave me! do not leave me! I feel that the world is growing dark around me! I feel that all reason is forsaking me! Alas, Clavis, I—"

"There, there, Dora!" he suddenly said, in a voice, tremulous with emotion, returning to her side, and seating himself close by her. "Your words, Dora, are torture to my soul. I know that I have done wrong; but, Dora, it is not too late to retrieve my error, to do justice to you, to myself, and to *others!* Nay, nay, poor Dora; do not interrupt me; I must speak now, or I could never again hold up my head in honor. I was puzzled and bewildered, Dora, by your beauty. I was fascinated by your laughing voice, your winning ways, your goodness of heart, and sweetness of temper. But, Dora, it *was* fascination, and nothing else. Forgive me for the words I speak; but I *love* only one—Agnes Arlington! To her I have pledged my troth, and, Dora, I do *not* love you as I do her! But, poor Dora, I feel very close to you, I feel that I could love you as a sister, and—"

"No, no, Clavis! I crave not such love as that!" and her words were wondrously quiet and calm, and her face was pale and stern, like marble.

The young man started, and gazed at her. But unheeding his anxious glance, she continued;

"You once intimated, Clavis, that you loved me! You won *my* heart, Clavis, and you have it still! Agnes Arlington, nor the world can change it! I *must* love you, Clavis, or I would die a raving maniac. And now I must be gone! We must part, Clavis! When we meet we must not know each other, since you would not like it; and are you going, Clavis?" she suddenly exclaimed, as her eyes fell upon the trunk.

"I could not stay here *now*, Dora; I leave to-morrow for Europe."

A low wail came from the stricken girl; for an instant her frame shook violently. Then she arose to her feet, and pulled the wet shawl around her shoulders.

"There, there, I can not look upon you! The comforting angels stand by me! And now, Clavis, we part; we must say farewell! We may never meet again on earth; but, Clavis, I shall ever pray for you, for your happiness! And, Clavis, think—think sometimes of poor Dora! Clavis, one request. Kiss me once, and then farewell *forever!*"

She held her mouth up to him. In an impulsive moment, he leaned down, pressed his lips to hers, and drew her yearningly to his bosom. Then, releasing her, he staggered back against the mantle-piece.

Another moment, and the door was opened, and hurriedly closed.

Dora Howe had gone!

And then, after a moment's pause, a long, low cry, wailed up, that winter night, and echoed in the now lonely room of Clavis Warne.

The young man sprang to the door, opened it, and looked out. But the blinding snow was scurrying down, and he saw nothing of poor Dora Howe.

That night, a poor wanderer, laughing wildly, muttering unmeaningly, crying at intervals, praying again, was picked up by the police.

Two days from that time, poor Dora Howe, a helpless maniac, was taken to her home in the interior.

And that home had already sorrow and sack-cloth upon it. The head of the family had just died, and his widow and children were suddenly—and to the surprise of all—poverty-stricken.

The day following that eventful night, Clavis Warne, the young lawyer, sailed away from his native land.

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER OLD LEAF.

NIGHT in a foreign capital—the streets lighted here and there with flaring gas-lamps—a drizzling rain

coming down—the shop windows dim and misty—pedestrians few.

The hour was ten o'clock.

Two young men stood together at the steps of the theater. The drop-scene was down for the last act, and the young men had made their way out of the crowded place to the more congenial atmosphere of the streets—more congenial because purer, and to be preferred to the stifling air of the crowded theater, despite the rain which was falling fast in a thick, penetrating mist.

"Come, Harry," said the taller of the two, speaking in English. "Come, the call-bell has sounded. Let us enter," and taking his companion by the arm, he turned and was about to re-enter the place.

"What time is it, Clavis?" asked the other, suddenly, not moving at all.

"Just ten, Harry; but, come, hurry in; they have a queer way here in Germany of taking possession of your seat if you are not in it when the curtain goes up. Come along; I hear the bell again.

Still the other paused. There was trouble upon his face; he was undecided.

"I cannot go back, Clavis; I have an engagement," he said, hesitating at the close of the sentence, and turning as if to go.

"An engagement, Harry? Why, I made *this* engagement with you a week ago. I certainly expected that you would spend the entire evening with me," and Clavis Warne looked very grave.

"I am sorry—very sorry; but, Clavis, I cannot help it. I promised—why, I promised the colonel to drop around to his rooms and smoke a cigar."

"The colonel? I am a little surprised, Harry; but when did you make such a promise as this?" and the young man gazed his friend in the face.

Harry Waring paused again, and looked around him with an air of vexation. But he knew that Clavis Warne's eyes were bent upon him.

"Well, Clavis, I promised the colonel last night, and—"

"Last night! Why, my dear fellow, to tell the truth, you do not seem to care for *me*, or *my* company!" said Clavis Warne, a little bitterly. "Please to remember, your engagement with me lasts through this evening, and that it was made a whole week since!"

"I cannot help it, Clavis," said the other, a little tartly. "I must go."

And he turned; but Clavis Warne laid his hand firmly upon his arm.

"Stay a moment or so, Harry—just a moment or so," he continued, seeing the frown that came upon the face of Harry Waring. "Pardon me, my dear fellow; you know that I am a friend to you—a warm and sincere friend. You cannot doubt it, and—"

"I do not doubt it, Clavis," said the other, half smiling; "but what has this to do with my meeting Colonel Thornton this evening for an hour?"

"It has a great deal to do with it, Harry," was the prompt reply—"a great deal which must result to your interest, if you follow my advice," and he bent his eyes steadily, but kindly on the countenance of the other.

Harry Waring's face slightly flushed under that scrutiny.

"I am well aware, Clavis," he said, somewhat bitterly, "that *you* do not like Colonel Thornton; but that is no reason why others should not. I have found him a clever gentleman, and a whole-souled, generous-hearted countryman."

"Granted—granted, Harry," replied the other, still kindly, though his face reddened slightly. "But I am more of a friend to you—remember that! And now, Harry, I will tell you in a few words *why* I am anxious about you in regard to your relations with that man."

He paused, and looked at the other; but Harry Waring bent his eyes on the ground.

"Colonel Thornton is a notorious gambler, Harry, and his reputation for honesty and fair-dealing is not—"

"By Jove, Clavis, this is too much! I can not listen to such words concerning a gentleman with whom I associate," was the hot interruption.

Clavis Warne's forehead wrinkled into a dark frown, and for a moment he bit viciously at the ends of his long mustache. But he controlled himself, as he said, quietly:

"What I said, Harry, I can substantiate, and what I said was spoken for your benefit. But I shall not dissuade you further. Good-night."

With that, the young man turned and re-entered the theater, while Harry Waring, without making any answer to the words spoken, left the brilliant lights in front of the theater, and hurrying away, was soon lost in the gloom of the street.

Another figure had hung upon the steps of the other two, every foot of the way, from the rooms in the fashionable thoroughfare to the small, unpretending house far away, on a little by-street in a disreputable quarter of the city. And when the figures walking in front had disappeared within the house, the other, lagging behind, after waiting a moment or so, entered likewise.

The wind was still flaring the street lamps, and the drizzling rain, fine and penetrating, came ceaselessly down.

Away to the rear of the house, on the second story, was a large and brilliantly-lit room. In it, seated at a table in the further end, were two persons playing cards, and two large piles of money were upon the table.

The large, portly, benevolent-looking man, with the gold eye-glasses, invariably won. Still the other drew forth his gold and staked it, unflinchingly, upon the hazardous game. No others were present in the room, except the bar-tender, half nodding behind the glittering array of cut-glass on his counter and upon his shelves.

Again another pile was swept away by the dexterous colonel. But, as he drew the money, rather hurriedly, toward him, several cards fell from his coat-sleeve.

In an instant the younger of the two men sprang upon his feet, and grasping the other by the collar, exclaimed:

"Give me back my money, you cheating villain!"

The older man started back, as a wild frown spread over his face.

"That for your words!" he suddenly hissed, at the same time drawing a knife from his bosom, and driving it vengefully full into the chest of the other.

With a wild cry, the young man flung his hands in the air, and fell to the floor, the warm, red blood flying forth, as the murderous blade was withdrawn.

At that moment Clavis Warne rushed into the apartment.

Before, however, he could reach the side of his fallen friend, the murderer struck him a violent blow with a chair and sent him reeling to the floor. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, the gambler had disappeared down the gloomy stairway.

Slowly Clavis Warne recovered his senses, and creeping up to the motionless figure of his bosom friend, he gazed at him. He started, as if struck with a knife. Then kneeling on the floor, he lifted his eyes and said, in a deep, stern voice:

"One day, Ralph Thornton, I swear to be even with you! So help me God!"

Harry Waring, young and gifted, was dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE CEMETERY.

A DARK shade passed over Delaney Howe's face, as he heard the rap on the door. He did not move, and he laid his hand on his old mother's arm, as she was hurrying up to answer the summons.

The old woman glanced at him inquiringly.

Again the rap sounded on the panel, this time very

distinct and loud, conveying in its echo something which seemed threatening.

Then Delaney Howe, with a frown on his face, strode forward and opened the door.

"Ah, Sainty, is it you?" he exclaimed in a relieved tone. "Will you come in?" and he threw the door wide open as if to welcome his guest.

"No, Delaney. I want to see you at once, *privately*," was the rude, gruff answer of Mr. Arlington, who, glancing in the room, saw the old woman with her eyes fixed upon him.

He drew back.

"What's your business, Sainty?" asked the other, coolly, at the same time bending a suspicious glance upon him who had called.

"I'll tell you when I can see you alone—when only *your ears* can hear what I have to say," was the cautious reply, given at a low breath.

"Is it about what we spoke of last night, Sainty—about the *job* for to-night?" and the other stepped outside to listen to the answer.

"No, not exactly; but get your hat, and come to the cemetery," was the reply. "I will await you there," and Mr. Arlington moved off, as he spoke, taking it for granted that the other would follow.

Delaney Howe felt in his bosom cautiously, as he left the door to follow St. Clair Arlington, who, seated negligently on a broad slab of granite in the cemetery, awaited him; and a smile passed over the young man's face as he muttered:

"The book has gone; but, *the knife is there, and that is what he seeks!* He'll be a better man than I if he gets that."

In a few moments Delaney Howe stood by St. Clair Arlington. There was a dark frown on the rich man's face, and an ominous flash in the deep glittering orbs behind his bright eye-glasses. He sat for a moment, without speaking; then, looking up, he said:

"You slept in my library last night." His words were menacing.

"Your library, eh? I slept in the library of the Arlington mansion, Sainty—yes," was the cool reply. "You see, I was afraid another cloud might come up, and another flash of lightning might shock *somebody!*"

Arlington's face paled for a moment; but, with a sickly smile, he said:

"A truce to such nonsense, Delaney! But," and his voice grew hard, "you slept in the library last night, and—"

"Nobody knows that better than I do! Go ahead; you have said that twice," was the reply.

"When I left the room there was a very important book in my secretary. When *you* left *there was no such look!* Give it to me, Delaney Howe, or I'll send a bullet through your head!"

As he spoke, he leaped to his feet in the twinkling of an eye. In a moment he had seized the other by the collar, and pressed the barrel of a pistol to his temple.

But he was not quicker in his movements than was Delaney Howe. No sooner had he caught the flash of St. Clair Arlington's eyes behind the glittering glasses, than, in a moment, a long gleaming blade twinkled in his hand. With his left hand he clutched the right of Arlington, which held the pistol, and bent it down like a feather. Then the keen point of the dagger scratched the rich man's throat.

A deathly pallor spread like wind over St. Clair Arlington's face; his eyes seemed to start from their sockets, his limbs shook beneath him. He was in the grasp of a young giant.

"Drop that pistol, Sainty! Drop it, or I'll cut your windpipe! Hurry, I say, Sainty! I am in earnest!" and he pressed on the knife, till the rich blood trickled down on his spotless shirt-front.

That pressure was a powerful argument. St. Clair Arlington could not withstand its potency. He dropped the pistol to the soft, wet earth without a word.

"Very good, Sainty! Now, I'll let you go! and if you will ask me a decent question, and await a respectful answer, I'll tell you that I know nothing about your book. I'll do more; I'll swear solemnly, I know no more where it is this minute than do you! There, will that do?"

Speaking thus, he released his grip on the other, and with a half-shove, sent him reeling backward.

"And I'll tell you another thing, Sainty," resumed the young man, at the same time stooping and picking up the pistol, from which, at once, he proceeded to remove the cap. "If you ever again try a trick of that sort on me, why, I'll just step over to the village, and have a little talk with a constable, eh? Do you see? Here, take your pistol!" and he tossed the weapon toward his companion.

Arlington made no reply. He caught the pistol and placed it in his pocket; then he felt his throat, which was stinging him a little. Then he seated himself on a grave-stone again.

Several moments passed in silence. At length, however, Arlington said:

"I believe you, Delaney. But that book *has* gone! I fancied you wanted it as evidence against me. You know the *scrap*—the *will*—came from that book! We can not afford to lose it, Delaney! I tell you, with that book gone, why our *profits* cease!"

He spoke very seriously. Delaney Howe reflected for a moment; he saw the truth of what the other had spoken; but he knew of no remedy for the evil. So he said nothing.

"Well, if that's your business, Sainty, it is now over; and I have not had my breakfast yet. I must go over to the village. Dora is ill, and I must summon the doctor. And he, who tarries in the Arlington mansion—*he* has broken her poor heart."

As he spoke, a fearful frown came to Delaney's face. He clenched his hand, and a bitter oath broke from his lips.

St. Clair Arlington glanced at him; a smile passed over his face.

"Clavis Warne has deeply wronged you and yours, Delaney, you know how!" he said, in a low, hissing voice; "and he is no friend of mine! He holds secrets! And, *mind you, Delaney*, do not forget that Clavis Warne sleeps to-night at the Arlington mansion! Good-by."

"Depend upon me; I'll not forget it!" was the reply.

The men parted—St. Clair Arlington hastened back over the plain toward his aristocratic old dwelling, and Delaney Howe turned again to his own humble home.

As the young man entered the door, his poor old mother again met him. As she threw her arms around his neck, a letter fluttered from her bosom and fell to the floor. Delaney Howe caught it with his foot, and, stooping, picked it up. His face crimsoned; then, as he turned it over, a dark flush came to his cheek.

"This letter has been opened, mother!" he said, in a threatening tone. "It is for *me!* Beware! beware! how you trifle with me!"

With that, he opened and read the communication. His face was covered with an ominous scowl as he finished it, and bent his gaze again on his mother.

Then, without a word, without a glance at her entreating face, without even a look toward the tempting breakfast, which the poor old mother had so daintily and lovingly prepared for him, he turned and left the house.

That morning when the humane physician came, he shook his head seriously as he noted the red cheek, the labored breathing, and the bounding pulse of his patient.

Promising to call in the evening, he left.

That afternoon, toward sunset, Delaney Howe emerged from the village, where he had passed the day, and took his way rapidly toward a neighboring forest, that grew to the east.

No one noticed him.

CHAPTER XVII.

HEART-SECRETS AND SUFFERINGS.

CLAVIS WARNE had just time to force the letter back into his bosom when the door opened. The mellow sunlight of this warm July day was pouring in through the open window; it streamed full on the pale, haggard face of her who had entered.

With a low cry of joy, the young man sprung forward, and, in another moment, had drawn to his bosom the fainting form of Agnes Arlington. For several moments no word was spoken. Each of the loving hearts seemed to be holding soft communion with itself.

At length, however, Clavis Warne gently disengaged his arm from her neck, and holding her at a short distance, gazed her in the face, his eyes glowing with a radiant, unextinguishable love-light, his chest heaving with wild emotion.

Then the maiden raised her soft eyes to his and murmured, in a low, sweet voice:

"Oh! the angels be thanked, Clavis, that I see you again!"

But, as she uttered the words, a deadly pallor came to her already haggard face, and a wild thrill shot through her frame. She staggered back. In an instant, Clavis, with his strong unwounded arm, caught her and prevented her from falling.

"What is this, Agnes, my love?" he murmured, in a gentle voice, as he tenderly assisted her to a seat. The girl started back with a shudder; she seemed to repel his kindness—to shrink away from him.

But, gently forcing her into a chair, he sat down by her.

"I know, darling, that long years have rolled by since we met—since that night, long ago, when beneath the gloomy shade of the old poplar on the plain, we pledged our parting vows. And ever, since then, sweet one, though I have been absent from you, my heart has warmed for you! Love for no other woman has ever thrilled my heart! And I have longed for you, dearest—longed even for a single item of news of you! Oh! darling, you know that your father, years ago forbade me his house, and I knew not, Agnes, that the poor old man was no more! Pardon me, my love, if my words give you pain, and—"

"There—there, Clavis! Speak no more *now* on that subject! I cannot bear it. Pity me, and—"

She hesitated, and bent her head—bent it so low that the glorious cloud of golden ringlets fell in the lap and upon the throbbing hand of him who sat by her. And Clavis placed that hand tenderly upon the glittering, aureate ringlets.

But, as if an adder had stung her, Agnes Arlington raised her head, and suddenly drew away again from him.

"Am I *distasteful* to you, Agnes?" he asked, as an expression of poignant pain shot over his face, and a large tear stood in his eye.

"No, no, Clavis! Oh, no, darling! And yet, spare me, Clavis!" and again her head went down.

Several moments passed, neither speaking.

Then Agnes Arlington looked up; her tears had ceased to flow, and she sat quiet and calm, as if, by some powerful effort, she had forced a peace of mind, even as her face was now emotionless and composed.

"I did not think *such* would be our meeting, Clavis!" she said, in a clear, audible voice. "I had long since mourned you as lost to *me*, forever! When you went away beyond the broad seas, without even bidding me a last farewell, my yearning heart was well-nigh broken! And, Clavis, I learned *why* you went away! I did not blame you; I knew, Clavis, that Dora Howe loved you, and that you, at one time, hinted that you were not indifferent to her. Nay, Clavis, do not interrupt me, for I know that, *in the end*, you were still true to me! And, I know, too, Clavis, that Dora, poor girl! was worthy of your love! Poor thing! she is not *now* what she was, and—"

"What mean you, Agnes?" and the young man bent his eyes eagerly upon her.

"I mean, Clavis, that Dora has faded wonderfully since then! And then, she—her family—has been reduced to poverty, and that, alas! poor Dora is now a maniac!"

"A maniac? No! no! Say it not, Agnes. This can *not* be!"

"Alas, only too true, Clavis!" and a choking sensation stifled her words.

Clavis Warne sprung to his feet, and heedless of the presence of her who sat there watching him with tear-bedimmed eyes strode up and down the room with anxious, nervous step. His mind was traveling back to that wild wintry night, of snow and north-wind, in the great city—that gray, gloomed eve, when, in his quiet rooms in Irving Place, he had crushed the heart of the gentle Dora Howe—crushed it as thoroughly as though it were trodden under a heel shod with iron. He was thinking of the thin-clad feet of that night—of the cold, wet shawl covering the frail form—thinking of the burning eyes—the eager, haggard face—thinking of that sacred moment when he pressed with his own the warm, yet almost bloodless lips of Dora Howe. There was a wild storm in Clavis Warne's bosom, for now the terrible truth had reached his ears, that poverty had laid its gaunt fingers upon the family who once lived in wealth and comfort—that reason had fled from the brain of her who had loved *him* so wildly, so tenaciously, so tenderly.

And he—the cause!

Suddenly the young man paused; a change came over his face; the hard, stern expression passed away; softness and gentleness came there again, and a love-light sparkled in his eye as his gaze fell on the face and figure of Agnes Arlington.

He drew near her, and seating himself by her side, took both her hands unresistingly in his.

"Listen to me a moment, and I will tell you what I have kept locked up in my bosom as a secret. But I see you know it partly, and I can not keep it from you—nor do I wish to do so. What I have to say can be told in a few words. Will you listen, Agnes, and then I will pray *you* to forgive me?"

The girl shivered, but answered at once:

"Say on, Clavis. I am listening."

The young man hesitated for a moment, but summoning up resolution, he turned to her and in a low voice, said:

"When I was studying, Agnes, in the city of New York, chance—nothing but chance—flung me in the way of Dora Howe. I met her at a select party. She told me that she lived in Labberton. That name was introduction enough for me, my darling Agnes, from whom I had just parted, lived there, likewise. I mentioned your name; she smiled with pleasure, and said she knew you well and loved you much! We met again. Dora Howe, at that time, Agnes, as *you* know, was wondrously beautiful and fascinating. I conceal nothing from you, darling. There was a loadstone attraction about her—a magnetism—a subtle yet mighty force, which, for a time (and she exercised it unwittingly), no one could resist. I did not forget *you*, darling—oh, no! Day and night I worshiped your image enshrined in my heart. But gradually, before I was aware, there arose along with yours, darling, another image, glorious and resplendent! Forgive me—forgive me, Agnes, if my words give you pain! I must tell the whole truth."

Agnes Arlington bowed her head, but spoke no word.

"Time passed on," resumed the young man, speaking hurriedly, "and almost every day I found myself in Dora Howe's company. I was not forgetting you, Agnes, but I was learning to bow down before another shrine! One day, under an impulse I could not resist, I took her hand—Dora Howe's—in mine, and told her that I loved her! Ah, the misery which that little declaration has caused me! Then I learned how madly she loved me! I suddenly awoke. In the twinkling of an eye, I saw that I did *not* love Dora Howe. I saw the pit into which I had fallen, and I determined, at all events, to be honest.

and to extricate myself from it. I, one night, told the poor thing the truth!" he continued, after a pause, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion. "And the memory of that night is seared deep in my brain! But, Agnes, I was ever true to you! I was misled; I did not know myself, but, before high heaven, I have ever been faithful to you!"

A long pause followed. An ashen paleness now overspread the haggard face of Agnes Arlington. She seemed, of a sudden, to have recalled a half-forgotten, hideous fact, and that again, Banquo-like, it was slowly rising before her.

She turned toward the young man, and lifted her eyes to his.

"I cannot escape destiny!" she said, in an anguished tone. "I, too, have a secret, a *fearful* one, Clavis, which, considering the relation existing between us in the past, I must tell to you." She paused.

Clavis Warne, his face now aglow with excitement, his eyes flashing brightly, looked straight at her, earnestly and tenderly.

"Go on, Agnes, my love," he said, gently.

The girl still hesitated; but, at length taking courage, she began again.

"I thought, Clavis, that you had forgotten me, that you were forever lost to me! And, Clavis, I had reason! It has been long years since I heard a word from you; yet, I knew that, in the meantime, you had returned to your native land! Oh, Clavis, why have you tarried away from your affianced so long—your affianced—alas! *that was!* Do not interrupt me, Clavis. I came to tell you this, and to"—she sunk her voice to a low whisper—"put you on your guard! Nay, please let me finish. I must hurry, and be gone, for if uncle knew I was here he would frown darkly upon me! Listen, Clavis; I will be brief. Father died seven months ago! It was thought he was drowned in the creek, by the village. Soon after that, my uncle, St. Clair Arlington, returned from abroad. He said he had been serving as a colonel in the Sardinian army. He came to this mansion, and quietly took possession. On searching for a will among my poor father's papers, none could be found. But one day my uncle did find a small scrap in my father's handwriting, to which I was compelled to testify! The cruel provisions, as given in that paper, crushed me! It seems, Clavis, that father was displeased at me, you remember, years ago, for going with *you* to the ball, instead of with Delaney Howe."

She paused, and, as she mentioned that name, a convulsive shudder passed over her frame.

Clavis Warne's face, too, grew darker as that name fell upon his ear; but he was silent.

"Well, Clavis," she resumed, "that piece of paper gave my uncle *all* of my father's property—every bit of it—and his wealth in gold and silver was immense; and though no one knew where he kept it, yet, it seems that my uncle has found it, for he spends money with a lavish hand. And I, Clavis, have *nothing!* I am as poor as unfortunate Dora Howe!"

Again she paused.

Clavis Warne started violently, and a peculiar look came to his eyes, a singular expression spread over his face. But he said nothing, and the girl again proceeded; this time, however, in a very low and tremulous voice.

"And Delaney Howe is my uncle's friend, and my uncle, at times, is very harsh and exacting toward me. And"—she paused for a moment—"and, Clavis, I am surrounded by peculiar circumstances—circumstances which control me, circumstances which blindfold my eyes and tie my hands! Oh! pity me, Clavis, when I tell you that, since you have been away a dark shadow," and she instinctively drew away from him, "has fallen at my feet. I have been unwary, and I have been snared!"

She bent her head, and again her tears flowed freely.

"*Snared*, darling? What do you mean? Speak, Agnes, my love!" and he leaned down eagerly over her.

"I have met another, Clavis! Time and again has he been in my company! I could not help it, could not avoid him. And my uncle *would* have it so. And now, Clavis, be calm, for all hope is over! *You come too late!* Oh, dear life! too late! too late!"

And her sobs came walling up from the bursting heart, one after another.

The young man rose tottering to his feet; his frame shook like an aspen leaf; the blood forsook his cheek; his eyes glared out, unmeaningly.

"What does this mean? Speak, my darling Agnes; tell me the truth!"

Agnes Arlington slowly lifted her eyes to his, her face now calm—calm in its despair, mable in its pallor. She glanced at him one ardent look, full of yearning love, and then her lips parted.

"My hand is not mine! 'Tis promised to another!" she wailed.

"Promised to another! Who dares—"

"Nay, Clavis, I have sworn to be the wife of another!"

"Do you love him, Agnes Arlington?"

"I hate the ground he treads on!"

"His name?"

"Dora's brother—Delaney Howe!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRANGE THINGS.

CLAVIS WARNE reeled, as if stricken by a rifle-ball. His eyes were blinded, and his senses seemed to have forsaken him. He staggered back and sunk into a seat.

Agnes looked up. No pen can describe the emotions rioting on her face. With her eyes starting from their sockets—her face bloodless—her golden hair hanging in wild disarray upon her shoulders, she arose to her feet, and staggered to the side of him who had sunk, as it were, helpless before the terrible words which had fallen from her lips. She leaned down, and, with her soft hands, pushed back the matted, disheveled masses from his brow, and imprinting a warm virgin kiss upon that bold forehead, she murmured in his ear:

"Though my hand is another's, Clavis, my heart can be but yours. Its every pulse thrills for you—for you alone, my Clavis! *My Clavis!* Alas, no; and yet I *can* give you up!"

As she spoke, she suddenly knelt and threw her arms impassionedly around his neck.

Just then a soft step echoed in the porch outside, and a dark shadow fell into the room.

Agnes looked up. She caught sight of the passing form; she saw the glitter of the gold eye-glasses!

But he who had trod so softly by had gone again.

With a face almost livid in the terror and confusion showing there, Agnes Arlington straightened up. Her face was preternaturally calm and hard, as she said:

"But, Mr. Warne, another object called me here. I came to put you on your—Hist! I can not speak more. I hear *his* step! Good-by, and God watch over you!" and without looking at him again, she hurried from the room.

Once in the hall outside, she hastened along, and turning abruptly an angle, almost fled on toward her room, in a distant part of the large old house.

She was near the door, when suddenly she stopped, as if an apparition had risen before her.

Mr. St. Clair Arlington stood near her door—a malicious smile, bitter and biting, curling his lip, hard, stony frown upon his broad face.

"I have waited for you, Agnes," he said, in a sinister voice, "and you have not kept me long. An obliged to you. I just have this to say: Please be more private in your demonstrations of affection toward strange young gentlemen. You certainly do not stand in the relation of mother to Clavis Warne. Besides that, it would not be well for *Delaney Howe* to witness the sight I saw; he is somewhat jealous, and given to spells of anger. That's all I have to say."

As he spoke, he made way for her to pass.

Agnes answered not a word, but, with flashing eyes and haughty port, she swept by him—whom nature had made her relative—majestically and disappeared in the privacy of her own room.

St. Clair Arlington still smiled that same sardonic smile, as he gazed at the door through which the queenly girl had passed. Then he turned slowly away down the hall, muttering as he went:

"I don't blame Delaney, by Jove! But she must be watched, for Clavis Warne is here after no good! We'll see what a day will bring forth!"

He had reached the stairs. Hurrying down, he disappeared in the solitude of his library.

Clavis Warne slowly recovered himself; the blood came again to his cheek, bringing life and color; strength gradually infused his muscles, and he raised his head. What a change those few minutes of suffering had made in his face. Traces of acutest agony were plainly visible, and great, deep lines of heart trouble marked his pale brow.

But he aroused himself, and glanced around him.

"And has it come to this?" he muttered. "Have I been a wanderer from the shrine so long, to return now and find it polluted by the worship of an Ishmaelite? Oh! this is too much! And yet shall I turn away again, and go lonely homeward? No, no! Something bids me remain and work out the problem, the solution of which brings me here. Agnes little dreams my errand here in Labberton, and I only had a faint idea of it until the revelation I have this morning listened to. I'll stay, and when my poor arm is well, why I'll watch and wait."

"Dora! Dora! *She* lives yet! Can *she* fill, in my heart, Agnes's place? What a—a thought! Yet, can I do otherwise? Heaven help me! I can not give up Agnes, but—"

Without finishing the sentence, he suddenly arose to his feet, and began to walk the room with a slow and meditative stride. Up and down he strode. He thought not now of his broken arm; he thought not of the strange adventures of the night before. His mind was filled with gloomy forebodings; dark clouds enveloped him on every side; strange questions were being put and answered, arguments were debated, and wild fancies were rushing through Clavis Warne's brain.

But, as if recollecting himself and his surroundings, the young man ceased his promenade, and again flung himself into a chair.

"I forgot myself," he said. "I forgot the *duty* which called me hither! I now know that it is a duty!"

As he spoke, he drew out the letter again from his pocket, and, after some difficulty, succeeded in spreading it open.

He glanced his eye over it, and read as follows:

"MR. WARNE:—We have heard of your reputation away out here in Labberton. Some of us remember you on a former visit, but that was years ago. I have written to you twice already, but you have failed to come as yet. I write again. A singular case has occurred here. An old man, leaving one child, suddenly disappeared some months ago. He was a wealthy man. His brother has succeeded to his property. A good many people here shake their heads and suspect foul play. *There has been a dark crime committed.* You are a lawyer and can work the matter out. Come down, and I tell you witnesses and proofs shall not be lacking! More than that, YOU ARE INTERESTED PERSONALLY IN THE MATTER. ONE WHO KNOWS."

When Clavis Warne had folded the note, he placed it in his pocket, and was about to take out the package containing the other two. But, just then, a low rap sounded on his door, and, in an instant, a narrow piece of paper was shoved in under the crevice at the bottom. Then the young man distinctly heard light steps hastening away.

Warne arose from his chair, and drawing near the door, stooped and picked up the small strip. He

glanced his eyes over it. There were a few scribbled lines upon it, which read as follows.

"Be on your guard to-day and to-night. If you value your life, *sleep not!* A. A."

The handwriting was familiar; the words written were grave. The paper fell from his hand, and with scowling brow and flashing eyes, Clavis again sat down.

This time, after glancing around him, he drew from his pocket a pistol and cautiously examined the leaden bullets lying in the chambers.

We will briefly follow Delaney Howe the afternoon of this same day, when, as the twilight was beginning to settle down, he left the village of Labberton, and took his way toward the dark belt of forest in the distance. The shadows of night had fallen when he entered the gloom of the woods; but he did not pause. He struck right into the depths of the forest, following neither road nor path, for there was none. He continued on at a slinging stride for half an hour.

Suddenly he paused as he came to a small, narrow path. Delaney Howe looked cautiously around him in the gloom, and then stepped suddenly up to a large tree bordering this path. He scrutinized the rough sides of the tree for several moments, and then he laughed low as he turned away and strode on up the path.

"The boys have gone on, and the coast is clear!"

And he hurried along.

Another half-hour elapsed, when suddenly he stopped at the foot of a hill. This hill was thickly covered over with dwarfish trees, growing closely everywhere. Below these, the wild vines interlaced in every direction, forming a complete net-work through which it seemed almost impossible for a rabbit to pass.

It was a wild, desolate scene, and the dense gloom hanging over every thing made it more lovely and dreary still.

Delaney Howe paused just an instant, and then, stepping straight into the thicket, made his way carefully along through the undergrowth. At length he stopped again, as he stood near the entrance, dark and gloomy, of what seemed to be a cave.

Placing his hands to his mouth, he uttered a low, peculiar cry. The lonely call echoed through the sleeping woods, but no answering cry came back.

Again the young man sent forth the wailing note, and once more waited in silence.

This time, there came back a wild, unearthly groan, proceeding, as it were, from the bowels of the earth. In a moment a dark figure rose before him at the entrance of the cave, a naked saber flashing in the dim light.

"Who comes hither? Friend or foe?"

If friend, advance and whisper low!"

said a deep voice.

"I am a friend, ever good and true;

True to myself, true, too, to you!"

was the reply, in a low voice, Delaney still standing at bay before the naked sword.

"Advance then, friend; I bend my ear;

Speak low the word, and never fear!"

was the solemn rejoinder.

Delaney Howe at once drew near and whispered some words. Then, in a moment, a red flambeau flashed far down in the cave, and the two who stood at the mouth disappeared in the large, distorted shadows of the gloomy place.

An hour afterward, Delaney Howe emerged from the cave into the outer air, and, glancing around him, strode away.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DARK PLOT.

THE shades of night had long since fallen. The moon had come out from behind a distant cloud-

bank, and was now gleaming down brilliantly upon the sleeping world. Faint lights were twinkling away in the neighboring village of Labberton, but the long-stretching wasteland lying between it and the Arlington mansion was unlit, save by the pale rays of the moon.

Arlington mansion was almost as gloomy as the silent, shadowy plain extending around. Only two lights beamed forth from the large, shambling old pile.

One of these lights shone faintly from the window of the room in which Clavis Warne slept as a guest; the other flashed out from the rear window of the library.

The night, in marked contrast, too, to the previous one, was all that could be desired. It was lovely.

Mr. Arlington sat in the library all alone. He was leaning his hand upon the secretary, his eyes bent on a small torn scrap of paper lying before him.

He ceased reading, and carefully folding the scrap, laid it upon the secretary along with a few other papers.

"That is all that is written upon THE SCRAP!" he muttered, "and that has been declared to be John Arlington's will! It is very well for me! and I'll not gainsay it! But it grows late!" he exclaimed, glancing toward the clock again, "and still, Delaney comes not! Be it so! If 'worse comes to worst' I'll do the work singly and alone! For I am not—"

A long, thrilling whistle at that moment echoed faintly in the room; and then again. Then came a gentle rap on the rear-door of the library.

Before Arlington could say "come in," the bolt was turned; but the door was locked.

A short, vigorous blow on the panel followed, as if the door had been kicked by a heavy boot.

Mr. Arlington turned to the secretary, on which lay the papers. Picking up one, he crowded it into his pocket-book, hurried to the door, and opened it.

In an instant the tall brawny form of Delaney Howestood inside.

"Where the deuce have you been, Delaney, all this time?" asked Mr. Arlington, gruffly.

"On my own business! See to it, Sainty, that you attend to yours!" was the prompt, sharp answer, as the young man pushed by, and flung himself in a chair.

"I am tired, Sainty! Excuse familiarity," he said, with a low, wicked laugh. "Have you found that book yet?" and he gazed the other steadily in the face.

"No, I have not! But, Delaney, we *have* work to-night; do not forget it!" said Arlington, in a voice slightly tremulous.

Howe started, and a serious look came to his face, as he replied:

"I know it, Sainty! It is *very* serious, and I don't exactly like it."

St. Clair Arlington turned upon him suddenly, his eyes gleaming like a tiger's.

"Are you getting chicken-hearted, man?" he exclaimed, in an angry tone. "I tell you, Delaney, our money is in danger—*our necks, too!* Do you mind?"

The young man started again, and for a moment his cheek paled.

"Then we'll work together, come what may!" he said, in a decided tone.

A long, earnest conversation followed. It certainly lasted an hour. At the end of that time, the hands on the clock now pointing to a quarter of twelve, St. Clair Arlington arose, and took down from a shelf a bottle. Beckoning his companion to follow, he extinguished all but one of the lights in the library, and, opening the door, crept softly out into the dark hall.

Delaney trod close behind him. The large old house was wrapped in perfect silence.

No sooner had the two confederates left the library than a small, bent figure, as of an old man, suddenly emerged from behind one of the book-cases, and approached the secretary. Leaning down over the

few scattered papers, he suddenly seized one, and secured it about his person.

Then, cautiously opening the library door, he, too, soon disappeared in the gloom of the hallway outside.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE CAVE.

WHEN Delaney Howe disappeared that night, after the conclusion of the singular dialogue, in the gloom of the black cavern, no further word was spoken for several minutes.

After the two had proceeded some distance—that is, Delaney and the man with the naked sword—they were suddenly joined by another, who carried a flaming torch in his hands.

Here a part of the same cabalistic ceremony was gone through with, and then a natural, easy conversation ensued, carried on in a light, rollicksome spirit, as the three hastened forward, deeper and deeper into the dark cave.

At length they paused as they reached a heavy door of wood, set, as it were, into the living rock. Delaney Howe drew from his pocket a key, and fitting it in the lock—a massive one of peculiar construction—soon rolled open the door. It moved back on its hinges without any sound soever.

The three entered at once, and in a moment the little room was aglow with the reflection of the flaming brand.

A singular sight was revealed. The apartment was quite small. It was a natural excavation in the earth, though it was plain to see that those who had occupied it had fashioned it with axes and picks somewhat to suit themselves. The sides of the apartment had been cut down, and the roof and floor leveled, making an irregular square of the place. But those walls, with the exception of the ceiling, were, to a considerable extent, covered with long strips of carpeting, suspended from above by nails, and reaching to the floor. This latter was entirely concealed from view by a magnificent carpet of costliest material.

The man with the torch stepped to the center of the room, and marching up, drew down a cord. Seizing this, he hauled to his reach a flashing, glittering chandelier. Then he proceeded to light the dozen tapers in the chandelier.

The effect was magical. Everything stood out in bold relief.

A long table occupied one side of the room; an elegant sofa the other. Chairs of most elaborate workmanship and costly material were grouped about; and in one corner, draped over from above with black cloth, bearing the death-head device, was a raised chair or throne.

"Ah! boys, this is comfort!" said Delaney Howe, familiarly, at the same time throwing himself into one of the easy-chairs, and stretching his limbs out cosily.

"Yes, commodore, all—"

"Don't 'commodore' me to-night, Dick! We will not hold a regular *council*, for I have not time," said the young man, hastily: "I have other business on hand. I received your communication, and having an hour to spare—knowing, too that you expected me—I have just run over for a while to have a little chat. What's the news, and how about the 'sail?'" and he eyed the other two as he spoke.

Those two were young men like himself—younger in fact than Delaney Howe. There was an air of recklessness, dare-deviltry, and bloodthirstiness about them which spoke badly for their morals. Though their faces were youthful, it was quite evident that the men were old in crime.

But one of them—he who had not as yet spoken—answered:

"Why, we were caught out last night on the old stage road while cruising about—caught out in the storm. But we kept our eyes about us, and saw something: a large traveling-trunk strapped behind

a hack—a young man—a stranger in these parts—inside. Perhaps he has gold."

Delaney Howe started just the least. He glanced at the speaker as he asked:

"Did you follow?"

"No, we could not; we dared not leave our hiding-place by the roadside. It was lightning fearfully. But the carriage was on the road to the village, that's certain, and if this stranger is in Labberton, why, we may find means to get at his gold or his throat!" and the man smiled grimly, as he lifted his coat-lapel, and tapped on the handle of a large scabbardless knife.

Delaney smiled, too, as grimly as the others. But, almost in a second, there came over his face a deep shade of thought, and then he leaned his hands on his knees, and bent his eyes down in deep meditation.

Gradually, however, the expression of thought passed away, and as he looked up, a glad triumph was on his face. He laughed low to himself, as he said:

"'Tis well, boys! And I have seen the young fellow, too. If he has not money he holds that whif he will bring it. Perhaps we may have to bring him here, and I am sure we can do it. In the meantime, take no steps in the matter; leave all to me. It may be that he will not live very long, as he was hurt badly last night. In any event, there's money in him—for somebody!" and he glanced around him again.

One of the men looked up, and asked suddenly:

"True enough, but will there be any for the 'brothers'—for us?" and he kept his eyes on young Howe.

That young man flushed for a moment—then his face slightly paled. He knew that the fierce eyes of those men were upon him; he knew, too, that their wills were like iron—their muscles powerful and brawny. More than that; he knew that beneath their coats sheathless knives were in their reach.

But he recovered himself, and answered, coolly:

"How can you ask, Fred? Are we not the 'Buccaners of the Plains?' and do we not all share prize-money?"

"That is all I want to know, commodore," said the man with a satisfied air, sinking back in his seat.

Then ensued a long conversation. At the conclusion of it, they all rose, and after joining hands in a mysterious manner, left the brilliant apartment—having extinguished the lights.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WINDOW LIGHT.

CLAVIS WARNE let the little strip lay where it had fallen. Long he sat there, pondering on his singular situation, and on the circumstances which surrounded him.

His arm was now giving him excessive pain, and the physician had told him positively that he must not leave his room that day.

He determined to stay at all hazards, but he would be wary. He was well aware that between him and St. Clair Arlington—whom he held firmly by some secret power—was no friendship. He knew the bold, wicked heart that beat in Arlington's bosom; he knew the man of old! Nevertheless, he would remain until the morrow, any way, and then he would say good-by to the mansion—good-by to Agnes!

The day wore away, and no one came near Clavis Warne's room, save the man-servant who brought his meals. The young man ate not a mouthful. He would not trust St. Clair Arlington in any way.

Clavis Warne longed to see Agnes again; he well knew that the little strip came from her. But, the day passed, the hot sun went down behind a purple cloud bank, and no friendly footfall echoed in the silent, dreary hall-way without. The dark night settled down. Anon the moon rose in splendor again and gleamed over "field and flood." Clavis

Warne did not light his lamp at once, but, drawing near the open window, sat down and gazed at the quiet, dreary scene.

Then as the minutes and the hours sped, thought after thought rushed through his bewildered brain. His mind wandered back over the dead years; the past, blissful and joyous in many respects, yet sad and gloomy in others, he lived over again.

Suddenly a bright light flashed out in the gloom far away over the plain. Again and again it beamed forth.

Clavis gazed intently at it. It was something to relieve the dull monotony of the shadowy, moonlight scene; something to recall his wandering thoughts.

All at once—he could plainly see it, though the distance was great—an open buggy drove up and halted in the reflection of the light. Then a man sprang out. Then, for a moment, the light disappeared, and all was gloom and darkness. But only for a moment, for suddenly the same light flashed out again, but more subdued, nor did it flare about as before.

Silently Clavis rose to his feet. He trembled with excitement, never once removing his gaze from the now steadily-burning light. He glanced around him, and turning suddenly, strode to the door of his room, and locked it. The snap of the bolt rung loud on the silent air, and awoke the echoes in the dreary, gloomy hallway without.

The young man stood still for a moment, scarcely breathing. But the sounding echoes died away. He turned, and going to a chair took his coat therefrom, and as well as he could, flung it over his shoulders, buttoning it with his unwounded hand.

Again he approached the window, raised it, and gazed out. The light was still gleaming far away in the gloom.

"I will go and see what it means; no harm can come of a little exercise. The air here oppresses me!" So saying he stepped out on the rickety porch, passed through the yard, and over the fence surrounding the mansion, and at last stood outside on the plains. He glanced back. A light was burning brilliantly in the library, and he saw a dim form walking up and down the apartment. The lamp which he had lit, was burning likewise in his own room; but, as it sat back, it did not show much.

In another moment, Clavis Warne, with the far-off light all the time in view, turned and strode away. He was soon swallowed up in the gray gloom of the wide-spreading waste.

The light came nearer and nearer every moment. He paused by a lonely little cemetery. One glance at the pale, time-stained marbles, and he hurried on.

Suddenly the outline of a small frame house arose upon his view, and Clavis paused. In front of the door stood a doctor's carriage.

He gradually drew near, and in a moment stood under the little window—whence flashed the light which had drawn him thither. He looked within.

A tall, sedate-looking man, with a very grave face, was standing silent and gloomy by a bedside. It was the doctor who had dressed his arm! Near him, her eyes filled with tears, and bent upon the physician's face—an expression of agony showing in her every feature—was an old woman. On the bed, motionless and white, more like death than life, lay DORA HOWE!

Clavis Warne sunk to the ground with a low sob wailing from his distracted bosom; then he arose, and tottered away in the gloom of the summer night.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE DREAM—AND A WOMAN'S LOVE.

A HALF-HOUR from that time, Clavis Warne, almost fainting from exertion and excitement, clambered over the fence which skirted around the old mansion, reached the window, and entered, flinging himself into a chair as soon as he was in the room. The clock in the hall struck eleven.

Sick in body, fainting in spirit, the young man leaned his head down and groaned.

Dora Howe in all her old-time beauty came before him; her soft eyes beamed lovingly upon him; her hand was in his; the form of Agnes Arlington grew dim in his heart.

And then a sudden and strange revolution of thought took place in his bosom. Dora Howe, motionless, pale, scarcely breathing as she lay there on that humble bed, in the poverty-stricken home—rose up before him! That marble-like image he could not drive out of his mind.

Then, gradually his face grew calmer, milder; the deep thought-shade faded away, and a sad, sweet smile spread over his features, as he murmured:

"It must be so! It *shall* be so! God, in His inscrutable wisdom has decreed it, and the same destiny which drove me yonder to that sorrowful abode, drives me on still in what must be the path of right! I'll struggle no more against fate! My efforts in such a warfare are futile! Agnes is lost to me, and, if God spares me—I *love it*—and if he spares *her*, my heart shall be Dora Howe's."

Gradually his wounded arm sunk by his side; his head drooped to one side, and then it settled down upon his breast. Worn out, in body and in mind, forgetting the warning he had received—forgetting all his own precautions—Clavis sunk into a deep slumber.

Clavis awoke with a sudden start, and glanced about him. Slowly he recollected himself, and where he was.

There lay the plain now in darkness; the moon had gone down, and the little light, far away, could no longer be seen.

He started. A creak, as of a shaking board, fell upon his ear. He felt for his pistol and stepped forward a pace.

His heart leaped wildly, and he half extended the pistol as he saw two dim forms, followed by another, hurrying away in the gloom along the creaking porch. Another moment and all three had disappeared around the angle of the old house.

With an expression of relief, Clavis Warne, trembling with excitement, stepped back in his room; and now, being completely worn out, he threw himself, without disrobing, upon the bed—the pistol still clutched in his hand, his eyes wide open, and his ear catching every sound.

The time wore on—the early hours of morning came, and still Clavis Warne lay with open eyes.

But gradually exhausted nature gave way; flesh and blood could not endure more than he had; his hand relaxed its hold upon the pistol, his eyes closed, and again sleep claimed him as a subject.

Suddenly the window, still open, was darkened, and the forms of two men stood there. They waited not a moment, but sprung inside. Instantly the room was filled with a half-suffocating odor, as of chloroform or ether.

The men stood by the bedside of the sleeper. One of them leaned over their intended victim.

At that instant a deep, unearthly groan echoed in the apartment. The men turned. A tall figure, in white, stood in the door, which was now opened, leading into the hall.

With a stifling cry the men sprung away, darted through the open window and disappeared. And, as before, a small, bent form, on the outside, slowly emerged from the gloom, and followed on after.

And then the white figure tottered into the room, and falling at the bedside, murmured:

"God be thanked that I could not sleep. And now, Clavis—darling Clavis—you are safe! safe!" and she bowed her head on the bed, and wept silent tears of joy and gratitude.

Then rising softly, she gazed for a moment at the motionless figure upon the bed, and turning gently, left the apartment.

As she passed the dim hall-light, its rays fell upon the spotless *robe de chambre* and angelic face of Agnes Arlington.

Clavis Warne still slept on, in sweet oblivion of all that had transpired around him.

The night passed; the dawn broke, and morning had come.

As before, Clavis touched not the meal which had been sent him.

Then the doctor arrived. After an earnest conversation with him, Clavis Warne descended with him to his carriage.

Mr. Arlington, pale and haggard, stood by. The young man approached him, and said in a low voice:

"I thank you, St. Clair Arlington, for your hospitality; at *some* day, I may be able to return it. But, hark ye, my friend—*your house is haunted!*"

He did not stay to observe the effect of his words, but, assisted by the doctor, got into the carriage.

In another moment they were driving rapidly toward Labberton.

And Clavis Warne had not seen nor said good-by to Agnes Arlington.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PACKAGE FROM A QUEER POSTMAN.

It was a chilly night in November of this same year. The few streets of the little village of Labberton were deserted—the lights from shop-windows throwing a sort of civilized glare about in the gloom. But, these were, one by one, extinguished, and soon the place was in perfect gloom.

Nevertheless, one light from the little group of houses flickered out on the night. We will go thither.

It was a small brick house; and on the window-casing was nailed a sign, already rusted and storm-stained. It bore the following:

CLAVIS WARNE, *Atty. at Law.*

Seated within the room of his small home, from which flashed the light, was the young lawyer. He sat by a table, leaning his hand upon it—his face as we have seen him last, pale and stern, gloomed over with anxious thought and a settled shade of sorrow. His left arm, however, was not now in splints and suspended in a sling.

The truth is, several months have elapsed since that morning when Clavis, after those significant words to St. Clair Arlington, entered the doctor's carriage and drove away to the neighboring village. And many events have happened since then; but which, as they do not have a special bearing upon our story, we will give only in brief.

The day on which Clavis Warne had left the old manor, he did not, as we have said, even say good-by to poor Agnes. The truth is, his mind was so confused that, as he did not see the maiden, he did not ask for her; but he was not indifferent to her; far from it. And, had the young man known that a pale, tear-bedimmed face was gazing out yearningly after him from behind the curtains of a room in the second story, he would never have left the house without a word of cheer to the lonely, stricken girl, who watched with loving eyes his every movement.

And when Clavis had gone—when the carriage in which he sat whirled rapidly out of sight, Agnes Arlington, with tottering steps, had sought her own apartment.

Late in the afternoon of that same day, a wagon from the village came for Clavis Warne's trunk. Agnes Arlington watched it go, too; but, though there was a slight shiver in her heart, yet her face remained impassive and cold.

As the days went by, gradually there came a softer expression to the poor girl's wan, marble-like features. Suddenly, one afternoon, a copious flood of tears came to her relief—opened up her woman's heart again, and saved from wreck her almost crazed brain.

Without a word to any one, she threw on her shawl, left the mansion quietly, and hurried across the plain toward the humble home of the widow Howe, in the distance.

Her sudden appearance in the home of poverty and sickness took all by surprise; but Agnes came

quietly in, embraced the poor old woman, and gently called her *mother*! Then she drew near the bedside of the sufferer, and took her hot hand in her cold, nerveless palm.

Day after day Agnes regularly made her appearance at the widow's; day after day she kissed the old woman's cheek; day after day she called her mother; day after day she sat by Dora Howe's bedside, and heard the sufferer murmur, "Clavis! Clavis!"

Thus the time had passed with Agnes Arlington, those long weeks and months. And, as the days went by, a look of resignation spread over her countenance, and her face was that of a vestal. Her daily visits were looked for, too, and were she an hour later than usual, the widow would grow anxious and nervous, and the sufferer on the bed would weep silent tears.

More than once Delaney Howe had been present when Agnes had entered. His eyes had burned into her soul, and he had watched her like a hawk. But the girl had spoken to him kindly and called him "Delaney," and then a softer expression—one telling somewhat of pity—came over the young man's face; but it had quickly gone.

Never but once, since the morning he had left the mansion, had Agnes laid eyes on Clavis Warne. That one time was on a dark night, when she sat by Dora Howe's bed; when the physician stood there, too; when Dora Howe's life was hanging on a thread. There had come a gentle tap at the door; the door had silently swung open, and a tall man, with a stern, sorrowful, handsome face—his left arm in a sling—stood there. One glance in the room, and he turned hastily, and closed the door. His echoing footsteps fading in the distance, told that he had gone.

The battle between science and death—if we can thus narrow down the contest—over poor Dora Howe was long and determined. But the faithful physician was ever ready at his post, watching every movement of the enemy. The crisis had come the night that Clavis had suddenly appeared, and as suddenly disappeared. The critical hour passed, and Dora Howe had a new lease upon life.

St. Clair Arlington was now a care-worn, haggard man. He was often in company with Delaney Howe, and the light in his library was never extinguished until the early morning. He was always stern and rude toward Agnes, though it was but seldom he met her.

Twice in the streets of Labberton, St. Clair Arlington had stood face to face with Clavis Warne; but between them there was no salutation, nothing but a quick flashing of the eyes, which showed that at heart they knew one another well.

Delaney Howe went occasionally to the mysterious rendezvous in the cave, and every time he came away the frown upon his face was darker and more ominous. A net was drawing around him outside; he felt it; these 'brothers' incumbered him; and then very dark thoughts grew up in his mind.

For some months past the mysterious shadow on the plain had, for some reason or other, failed to make its appearance. People wondered at this, for there were curious ones who made it a business to watch for it—at a safe distance. Various surmises, too, were made of it among the more superstitious; some of which were to the effect that old John Arlington's spirit was "laid"; others had it that the shadow had disappeared for a time, only to come again in a more awful form; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

But, at length it made its appearance once more, and it was the same old shadow! He who saw it was Delaney Howe.

The young man had been out searching for Dora, who was abroad that inauspicious evening, and was crossing the open common on his return home. He knew well enough that Dora often went, in her wild moods, to watch the shadow herself; but he would not have dared to seek her *there*!

Shortly after his return to his home, with a white, scared face, Dora came in, smiling, and talking her poor, foolish words.

Clavis Warne's arm, thanks to the skill and unremitting attention of the village doctor, was long ago well and as strong and useful as ever. The young man had opened, unexpectedly to all, a law-office in the village; though as litigation was not often resorted to by the worthy inhabitants, it was impossible to see that he had any encouragement. Nevertheless, Clavis Warne was very busy. Always in his quiet office, he was striding up and down the room, his face wrinkled with deep thought; or, he was sitting by the table with scattered piles of paper—scraps, memorandums and letters, his eyes bent moodily upon the heaps before him; or, again, he was sitting by the same table with a pen in his hand, carefully and slowly jotting down item after item.

On this night he sat by his office-table leaning his hands upon it. His face, as always, was the theater of vexed thoughts and contending emotions.

There came a loud ring on his office-bell. Clavis started. Who could this be? Delaney Howe and St. Clair Arlington flashed through his mind.

Thrusting his hand in his bosom, Warne, with a look of grim determination upon his face, entered the hall, approached the door and opened it, when a parcel was flung in by some one from without.

The young man strode quickly to the steps and peered out. In the distance, hastening away, he saw the dim outlines of a form. Then it was gone.

Re-entering the hall, the young man closed the door, picked up the parcel, and hurried into the office. With nervous fingers, he untied the twine and unrolled the bundle.

A long, thin memorandum-book—evidently made years ago—and a letter fell out upon the table.

The young man picked up the letter and glanced at the superscription. He started violently and trembled like a leaf. He knew that handwriting! That handwriting had called him hither!

He tore the envelope with greedy fingers, spread out the folded sheet, and read—

At that moment his office-bell again rung; this time, not so loud and fierce as before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

THE young lawyer raised the lid of the desk at which he sat, and cast into it both the book and the letter which he had not time to read, or even to glance over.

Locking the desk, he arose and went to the door. He saw there a closely-veiled female figure.

The woman glanced quickly around her, and then, without speaking, hurried by him into the hall; then into the office.

Clavis closed the door; and with wonder in his bosom, followed.

"Well, madam," he said, as soon as he had entered the room, "be seated, and tell me in what manner I can serve you," and he endeavored to penetrate with his gaze through the thick black veil covering the woman's face. But, he sat down himself, still keeping his eyes upon the other.

"You do not know me, Clavis! Then I am well disguised!" said the visitor, in a sweet, yearning, trembling tone, and she threw her veil back.

"Agnes!" exclaimed the young man, springing to his feet, his eyes gleaming, his limbs trembling beneath him, from excitement. "You here?"

"Yes, Clavis; is my visit distasteful to you?" and she gazed him sadly in the face.

Going up to the girl, who watched him with her sad eyes, Clavis took her by the hand, and said:

"Yes, Agnes, I am glad to see you; but I would be false to my heart—false to you, darling Agnes—false to everything that is honest and honorable, did I not say, too, that your visit gives me pain—that, my sweet one, you, whom alone I can *really* love—that the less often we meet the better for us both!"

He looked at her with tearful eyes, as if inviting her to proceed.

Agnes casting down her eyes, said in a voice low and tremulous with excitement:

"I know, Clavis, that *we* can never be united in ties closer than those of friendship. God has so ordered it, and we cannot say nay! We *must* bow, though our hearts should break. But, Clavis, there may be a happy day for *you* in store. You are young and gifted, and well fitted in every way to make woman happy. As for me, alas! I will fulfill my vow! I will marry Delaney Howe, and then—then, Clavis—I'll die! Nay, start not, and let not unjust suspicions enter your mind! I mean not self-destruction; I mean not that I will solve this terrible problem by taking that which God gave. But, Clavis, I am dying *now*, by inches, and I cannot long survive my wedding-day. That day, one month from to-night—the night of that day—the anniversary of my father's disappearance! Oh, *is* it thus fated? But, Clavis, time flies. Listen to me yet further, and give careful heed to what I have to say. In the dear old days, Clavis, you admitted that your heart, for the time, at least, was touched with something like love for Dora Howe. I beg you not to interrupt me, Clavis, for time goes swiftly; I have other things to tell you, and then I must be gone. I know the old tale well, Clavis, and I will not recall it. But, as you know, Dora Howe has been spared to life. She is still fair to look upon, and her heart is as tender as of old. Marry *her*, Clavis; restore, by that means, her wandering reason; make *her* happy; lift those poor ones from their misery and reform Delaney—my husband to be! Marry Dora, Clavis, and I will pray for you both, night and day. She has not forgotten you, for, time and over, has she breathed your name—ah, how tenderly!—when she knew not of what she was speaking."

Agnes paused; her face, though still pale, was tinged now with faint roses, for the warm blood was welling up grandly from her woman's heart.

"Will you promise me, Clavis, that you will think of this—think of it well—and let the voice of *Duty* be heard?" and she gazed him straight in the face.

"I promise you, Agnes," he said, in a low, almost inaudible voice, "*provided* that hideous wall between you and myself be not removed ere it be too late!"

Agnes Arlington's face lit up with a sudden glow, and for an instant a wild light flashed in her eyes; but, the glow passed away, the light faded out, and a cold shiver thrilled her frame.

"No! no! I dare not *dream* it!" she murmured, as if to herself. "The wall cannot be removed—save by God's interposition! But, Clavis, before I go, I must tell you something else. *Be on your guard. My uncle and Delaney Howe are not friends to you!* This morning I overheard them talking in the library, and have, on more occasions than one; and with your name were coupled dark threats! Oh! darling, be careful! My uncle, I know, is a wicked man, for, Clavis, I have *felt* his power! Now, darling Clavis, pray for me as I do for you: pray that, if we be not happy here, we may be hereafter! Think of what I have spoken to you—of poor Dora Howe—and, above all things, be watchful and wary! Clavis, good-by, and may God help you ever!"

She held her hand out. Warne took it, and in an impulsive moment he drew the maiden to his heart and imprinted one long, warm kiss upon her lips.

For a moment the poor girl half yielded to his yearning caress; but then, as if recollecting herself, she drew away like a frightened doe, and a crimson blush spread rapidly over her pale face.

In another instant she had torn herself away, and hurried out into the street.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE WASTE-LAND.

AGNES ARLINGTON had not gone ten yards from Clavis Warne's when a man stood before her. Instantly he had clutched her by the wrist.

"I have followed you, Agnes Arlington, and I have caught you!" he exclaimed in a hissing tone. "What were you doing in Clavis Warne's office? I saw you enter, and I saw you come out! Speak, girl!"

At first, Agnes was startled; but shaking off the man's grasp, she said, in a low, determined voice:

"Unhand me, Delaney Howe! Unhand me, or I'll cry for help! This well becomes your character, and I'll not forget your gallantry! Good-night, sir," and she was about to move on.

But the young man, stepped before her.

"Not so soon, my pretty one! I *will* know what you were doing in the office of Clavis Warne! Why did you go there?"

Agnes, trembling in every limb, hesitated, and then answered:

"I do not forget my *oath* to you Delaney, and I shall marry you at the appointed time, unless you yourself release me. But my business with Mr. Warne had nothing to do with the relation existing between you and myself. I went on other business, which concerned *him* more than you or me."

He did not answer for a time; but, at length, said:

"I'll take you at your word, Agnes; and now, I'll just see you home, for the plain is dark and a snow-storm is coming up. So, let's be off."

He spoke very decidedly. Agnes silently took his arm, and in a few moments they disappeared in the gloom of the deepening night.

Clavis Warne suddenly aroused himself. He had almost forgotten the parcel which had been flung in to the entry. He lifted the lid of his desk and took out, first the letter, then the memorandum-book. As he carelessly lifted the latter, its leaves spread open, and a torn, jagged scrap of paper was revealed! He glanced his eye over it, his cheek paled, and his eyes fairly burned into the paper before him.

When he had read the small script carefully through, he placed it, almost sacredly, upon his desk, and secured it with a heavy paper-weight. Then, taking up the letter, he read as follows:

"I see, sir, you have come at last—come at the mysterious bidding of one, *who represents justice!* Guard this scrap of paper and the memorandum-book as you would your life's blood! On examining both you will see *why* this request is made. He who writes this has watched over you, eagerly, since you have been here, and he sees that you *can* be trusted. Trust him who writes this. Whatever news may reach you, keep quiet; do not show your power; do as I have done—*abide your time!* And *that time is swiftly coming!* Do not be surprised at a visit from one you may not know, but one whom, in times past, you have seen. Now, a word more. *Seek the shadow and follow it. There is a mystery in it!* And *this is the night, if the moon shines from behind the clouds!* Be watchful and be strong, and right must come!"

Warne slowly laid down the letter, and pondered for several moments. Then he gathered up the book, the scrap and letter, and making a secure bundle of them, placed them in the desk, locked the lid down and put the key in his pocket.

A singular light was beaming in his eyes—a strange glow of triumph hovered on his cheek, as he slowly rose to his feet and commenced to stride up and down the room, with a firm, self-assured step.

Up and down the room he strode, and one hour passed. Then the young man muttered, in a low voice:

"*It has come! I see through the mystery! but the end is not yet!* And the Shadow! Yes, I'll follow the advice; and I'll trust him, even as he places confidence in me!" then, drawing on his overcoat, took his hat and gloves, extinguished the light and hurried out.

He took his way swiftly on through the deserted streets of the sleeping town. No one was abroad. It was now eleven o'clock and all lights were out.

In twenty minutes the young man was upon the

wide, desolate common. He knew well the spot whereon he had once beheld the strange Thing. His heart beat wildly, as he approached the place. Then he started almost with affright, for there, not ten yards ahead of him, was the little hillock on which the carriage had upset; and there—oh! horror! not ten yards further on was the gigantic, motionless Shadow!

But, in the twinkling of an eye, the Shade was gone! Clavis, not to be thwarted, dashed forward, only to meet nothing! But glancing to the westward he saw dimly in the distance a flying figure in ghastly white. Not daunted, he darted on after it, but the figure fled on the faster. The race was an exciting one. On, on, and yet the young man held his flying way.

Suddenly the White Thing disappeared, as if swallowed up by the earth, and with a feeling of awe—something, indeed, akin to terror, Clavis all at once found himself in the lonely little cemetery, among the storm-stained gravestones.

He glanced around; but the figure was nowhere in sight. And there, not a hundred steps away, the humble home of the widow Howe reared its dim outlines in the gloom.

He sat down upon an old slab and looked around him at the dismal, dreary scene. He could scarcely realize his position.

Then, suddenly, a pale light flashed from the window of the lonely house, and the rays glittered into Clavis Warne's eyes. A strange feeling grew apace over the young man as he continued to gaze at the light. Fifteen minutes passed—then a half-hour.

"Destiny! destiny!" suddenly muttered the young lawyer. "I cannot resist it! I follow!"

So saying, he rose to his feet, hurried out of the gloomy precincts of the cemetery, then pushed on and in a few moments he rapped lightly on the door of the little house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN EMPTY TREASURY.

DELANEY HOWE listened intently for a moment. Then he placed his eye to the keyhole and peered through. A bright light was burning in the room, and St. Clair Arlington was reclining upon a table, evidently asleep, for he did not move.

Delaney Howe straightened up and struck the panel of the door again, at the same time turning the bolt several times with a rattle. Then he placed his eye again to the keyhole.

St. Clair Arlington had been aroused. He was looking around him, as a wild expression spread over his haggard face. But, without waiting, he rose to his feet, and drew near the door.

"Who's there?" he asked, in a low voice.

"A friend, Sainty, and you know his voice!" was the reply from Delaney Howe.

The door was opened, and Mr. Arlington stood there. He did not bid the other enter, but remained in the doorway, as he asked, in a stern voice.

"What do you want, Delaney Howe? It is very late, and I am worn out."

"I'll tell you what I want, Sainty, when I am inside," was the coarse reply. "I am tired, too," and pushing by the other, he entered the room.

Arlington frowned and glared after him. But he closed the door, locked it, and returned to his seat.

"You see, Sainty," resumed the young man, carelessly, "I was just returning from the village; I accompanied Agnes home."

St. Clair Arlington started.

"Agnes! did you say, Delaney?"

"Yes. You see, I found her in strange company, and, considering the relationship existing between that fair maid and myself, why I thought I would see her safely housed here."

"Where, and in whose or what company did you find her, Delaney?" he asked.

"I saw her come from Clavis Warne's law-office, and I saw him and her talking earnestly inside."

"Clavis Warne's office! My God! this is too bad!"

"That's what I thought, Sainty. I consider such conduct highly unbecoming, when I remember that Agnes is to be my wife one month from to-night."

"One month from to-night! Ay! I had forgotten! But, Delaney," he continued, speaking rapidly, "that will be the *fourteenth*, and, good heavens! it will be an *anniversary*! Did you think of that? You can have your way, Delaney, and I can not say nay. But I can tell you one thing; that ceremony will not—*shall not* take place in this house."

For an instant, a flush of anger mantled Delaney's swarthy cheeks. But his face suddenly changed again, and he said, with a low laugh:

"Don't be alarmed, Sainty, especially before you are hurt! I have no intention of marrying Agnes Arlington *here*. That would necessitate display and expense, and I would save you that! I shall have the ceremony performed where no display will be expected—at my mother's. However, Sainty, I came for something; I want money—I'm cleaned out again!"

Strange to say, St. Clair Arlington did not start this time. He showed no emotion whatever.

"So do I want money, Delaney—and I have none!" he said, as a bitter laugh curled his lip. "But what I have I will share with you. I have now only eight hundred dollars!"

"Is that true, Sainty? Can it be so?"

"Before God, I mean it!" was the answer.

The young man saw the other was speaking the truth—that he was in terrible earnest.

"A small sum to marry on, Sainty—to begin keeping house!" said Delaney Howe, with a bitterness in his tone. "And this being the case," he continued, "that the treasury is low—why the time has come when we must search around for the other, the big pile! It is somewhere and we shall and must find it! We are too deep into it now! That immense pile of gold and silver and plate is somewhere, and I believe it is in this house! Come, Sainty, there is no better time than now. We'll search for that gold—for gold to us now is life itself!"

St. Clair Arlington's face brightened.

"You are right. Time is precious, and we must have gold! The hour is propitious, and we'll search *thoroughly* this night. This old mansion was built in other days, and it is filled with all sorts of old closets, secret passages, and out-of-the-way places! And if the gold is here, by heavens, we'll find it!"

"And having found it, *will divide*, Sainty—don't forget it!" said Delaney Howe, with a grin, significant smile.

"I'll not forget any thing I have promised, Delaney! Trust me for that!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

SOMETHING FOUND.

IN a half-hour's time the two night prowlers, dark-lantern in hand, were in the cellar of the old mansion, at their work. Every old nook and cobwebbed corner was examined; large heaps of old lumber, stowed there for kindling wood, were overturned; but, as yet, they had met with no success.

They paused for a moment—and consulted in a low tone together—and then, turning at once, reascended the stairs, and entered the hallway again.

Avoiding the inhabitable portion of the house, they sought the quaint old wings—the most ancient part of the building.

Then began a most thorough search. Every closet was ransacked, the walls of the rooms, the flooring and ceiling were sounded for secret ways, but all in vain.

The men paused.

"A bad job, Sainty!" "What's to be done?"

"Precious little more. There's the garret above, but nothing can be stowed away in that. The servants, too, keep their things there. We must give this up for to-night. Come, Delaney, we'll go!"

Then the two turned and retook their way toward the library.

Little did St. Clair Arlington and his tool think

that a dark figure had hung upon their steps, whither soever they went, and when they had left the last room in the old deserted back-building, that this mysterious figure had emitted a low chuckle, and then crept silently up-stairs, and disappeared in the gloom of the lonely garret.

They were soon in the library. Mr. Arlington, lighting other tapers, flung himself into a chair. Delaney Howe remained standing.

"Well, Sainty," he said, in a half-hurried manner, "the thing's up for to-night! I must go—but we'll divide the eight hundred—according to agreement. Four hundred dollars are considerably better than *nothing*!"

Arlington said not a word, but rising, disappeared around the angle of a bookshelf.

As soon as he had gone, Delaney Howe reached over suddenly, and strove to lift the lid of the secretary. But it was locked, and an expression of disappointment came over his face.

Just then St. Clair Arlington returned, bringing the money—as before—in gold and in notes. This was quickly divided—each taking his share.

Delaney Howe, after stowing the gold and bank-notes about him, rose to his feet, and saying simply, "Good night, Sainty—better luck next time!" turned and left the library by the rear door.

He strode along hurriedly over the plain. Suddenly the sharp rattle of a vehicle, as if driven rapidly, sounded ahead of him, in the direction in which he was hastening.

In an instant he had dropped on his knees under the gloom of one of the old poplars.

He had scarcely sunk down, when a black, closed spring wagon, drawn by one horse, rolled by him.

As his eyes fell on the vehicle he started—then a low laugh burst from him.

"'Tis all right!" he muttered. "The 'Buccaneers' have overhauled some strange sail on the old cruising ground! that's all. And I'll see to-morrow."

In a moment more he was lost in the gloom!

St. Clair Arlington sat for an hour after Delaney Howe had left the library. But when the clock struck one, he started.

"Yes, I'll search again through the old box!" he muttered. "It was there I found my first good luck—the will! I am not sleepy, and the sooner to work the better!"

So saying, he rose, and going to a small closet behind a book-case, he opened the door, and stooping down, drew out what seemed an old tea-box.

Dragging it after him, he hauled it by his seat, near the secretary, where the light from the chandelier would fall directly upon it.

He kicked off the old lid, and was about to stoop down, when something attracted his attention, and he paused as if shot.

It was a piece of paper—yellow with age—tacked to the bottom of the board he had just kicked from the top of the box.

St. Clair Arlington peered down at the piece of old paper. He scarcely seemed to breathe.

On the paper were the points of the compass marked down, and courses laid out, and at the bottom of it several lines in a bold handwriting.

With nervous, yet cautious fingers, St. Clair Arlington dislodged the tacks, which held the paper, and taking the old parchment in his hand, he gazed at it with burning eyes. Then he muttered:

"I have found it! And—DELANEY HOWE! A BULLET IS IN MY PISTOL FOR YOU!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVING HEARTS AND LOVING HANDS.

WITHOUT waiting to be bidden, Clavis Warne turned the bolt, and entered the widow's house. He had seen a light in the window, and, as he stood by the door, had heard voices in the humble dwelling. He could not draw back; something seemed to impel him onward—to bid him look again upon Dora.

Seated in a large chair, close to the fire burning brightly on the hearth, was Dora Howe, thin, frail,

yet transcendently beautiful. A little shawl was flung over her shoulders, and she was rubbing her hands together, and holding them toward the cheery blaze.

Near the girl stood the old mother, looking affectionately, yet sadly, at her. She had just spoken some words in a low tone, as the rap sounded in the room! She paused as the door opened, and as her eyes fell upon Clavis Warne—to her a stranger, for she had never seen him—her face paled, and she shrunk away toward the chimney corner.

The young man paused. His heart was throbbing wildly; his brain was reeling. But, by an effort he controlled himself, and removing his hat respectfully, he said:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Howe—for such I take you to be—I am one who once knew your daughter Dora! I am—I am Clavis Warne!"

"Clavis Warne! My God, sir! And what—"

At that moment the girl suddenly rose to her feet; her eyes, lustrous and black as night, were starting from her head. The well-remembered name had fallen upon her ear. Those beaming orbs fell on the young man's face, and then, with a wild cry, she tottered forward.

Another moment, and she had flung her arms around his neck, and her head sunk upon his shoulder. Clavis Warne drew her frail form close to his breast, and his eyes were lit up by an almost holy fire. He pressed his lips to hers in one long, ardent kiss. That token of love brought life back to the fainting maiden.

Still clinging to him, her eyes full of love and yearning, her warm breath upon his cheek, she murmured:

"The good God be thanked, Clavis, that you have come again! Come again to cheer my lonely heart and to chase the shadows from my brain! Here, mother, here he is! Here is my darling, mother! and he has come back now, never to leave me again! Clavis! Clavis! is it not so, darling?" and her eyes burned with a wild look of inextinguishable love into his.

Regardless of the presence of the bewildered old woman, he rained kisses upon her face, and smoothed back her glossy hair with his hot, nervous hand.

"What does this mean, sir!" at length asked the poor mother, scarcely crediting her senses.

"It means, my dear madam, that, after many heart-aches and trials, my heart has at last found its mate!" exclaimed the young man. "I have come, my dear mother—I can call you so—to take Dora to my heart, to restore her to reason. I have come to say that, after a while, I will take her and you from this house of poverty to my own home."

Two hours of uninterrupted bliss ensued. At the end of that time, Clavis Warne, said good-night to the old mother, and promising to call often went out. He did not notice that a white form stood in the door of the little cottage and gazed yearningly after him, as he was swallowed up in the darkness.

Clavis Warne strode on; his heart light, and his soul rejoicing. Suddenly he paused, as a dark object loomed up ahead of him, black and motionless. The young man felt that something was wrong. Without hesitating long, he turned as if to retrace his steps and to pursue his way to the village along the old stage road, when he was struck suddenly from behind a fierce blow upon the head. He went down. Instantly two men sprung upon him, bound him, gagged, and, dragging him along a half-dozen paces, flung him heavily into a close-covered wagon. In a moment more the vehicle was jolting rapidly away.

Gradually consciousness returned, but he could not speak, nor could he move. On rattled the wagon. Then it entered a lonely, black road in the midst of a forest, where it halted.

The men came around, and dragging the helpless man rudely from the vehicle, they grasped him in their arms, and bearing him between them, plunged right into the woods.

At length they entered a dark cave, and cast their burden heavily upon the cold earth.

The time flew by—a half-hour, then an hour. From sheer exhaustion, despite his terrible position and surroundings, Clavis Warne's eyes closed; his senses were slipping away, and a deep sleep was creeping over him, when a twig snapped at the mouth of the cave. Instinctively the young man opened his eyes and glanced thitherward. A feeling of irrepressible awe spread over him, as his gaze fell upon a white, moving object.

"Hist! Clavis! It is I—Dora! I knew the Black Wagon! Speak not, darling, when I remove the cruel gag. They who would murder you, at the least provocation, are not twenty paces away! I know them! And, as you value life, breathe not a word."

In a moment Clavis Warne felt the thongs removed from his ankles; then the gag was drawn from his mouth. He staggered to his feet. The poor girl laid her hand gently upon his arm, and whispered:

"Now, my own Clavis, follow without a word!"

From the dark cave into the gloomy woods, they went, the girl leading the way, as one thoroughly acquainted with it. At the end of a half-hour Dora paused upon the broad stage-road.

"We part here, Clavis," she said, in a low tone, her words, as they had been all along, perfectly rational. "Yonder, where you see the black group, lies Labberton. Go thither. I will return home, or mother will be uneasy about me; and I fear Delaney. Now, Clavis, a word before we part. Bloodhounds are upon your track! Be wary. When the day shines to-morrow, be not known as Clavis Warne. I know you understand me! One more kiss, Clavis, and good-night!"

In a moment she had flung her arms around his neck; in another, she was gone.

The next day, early in the morning, Clavis Warne quietly took down the sign from the window-sill and settled for his rent. He requested, however, that his trunk be allowed to remain in the house.

The office was not long without a tenant, for that very evening an old man, who said he gave lantern-shows and tableau-entertainments, applied for the room, and obtained it.

He was a stranger to all.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHOWMAN'S LATE VISITOR.

TIME rolled on; and December was ushered in, icy and bleak.

The old man still occupied the room recently in possession of the young lawyer; but he had no visitors, and always kept himself to himself. He spent most of his time with a magic lantern, getting the proper light, the right distance, and the correct clearness. Strange to say, the objects which showed on the transparent curtain before the magnifying lens of the lantern, were scribbled sheets of paper.

Day by day the old man amused himself thus, and then it was given out by his landlord that the old showman was to give an exhibition. But no hall in Labberton was then suitable, and the landlord had suggested that Mr. Arlington, of the manor, would gladly allow the exhibition to be held there, and that, if the old man wished it, he (the landlord) would see the gentleman and get his permission.

The old showman had started at this; and then, he laughed, and acknowledged his thanks in his squeaking voice, saying, at the same time, that, from what he had learned, the large parlor at the mansion would be the very place for his purpose.

Strange to say—and yet not strange, for we are not attempting to deceive the reader—on more occasions than one, a frail female figure had entered, at night always, what was recently the law-office of Clavis Warne. But, she did not remain long, and when she left, one night, the low light in the hallway revealed the wan, pale, yet beautiful face of Dora Howe, the mad girl.

Late one night, the old man—whom the reader must know to be Clavis Warne—sat by his desk.

The room was in deep darkness, but the brilliant bull's-eye of the magic-lantern was shining full on the stretched curtain of white muslin beyond.

The old man—as we shall continue to call him for awhile—cautiously took up an object glass, obscured the light for a moment, and then flashed it full on again. On the curtain large, well-defined letters stood out, reading singularly disconnected, and without meaning for the entertainment of an audience.

The old man then fitted another plate, and flashed the light on once more. This time, likewise, it seemed to be the reflection of a large, entire sheet, whereas the other had torn, ragged edges. This time, too, what stood out so boldly had a meaning; in it was absorbed all that had appeared from the first plate.

"'Twill do. 'Twill do well!" he muttered; "and now—"

"There is no need to fail, CLAVIS WARNE!" said a low, calm voice at his elbow.

In an instant the showman turned; like lightning he sprang upon the little bent figure which stood by him, then his strong nervous hand was upon the other's throat, and he pushed him backward upon the table.

"Hold! hold! Clavis!" gasped the other. "You would strangle your best friend! There, lean down, and I will tell you who I am!"

The showman tremblingly released his hold, and bent his ear to catch the whispered words.

"You! You! My God, I thought you were dead!"

"No, no young man; and I am come now to help you—to be present at the show—to be a witness in a tableau—to furnish you material for that tableau!"

"Thank God that you have come!" he muttered; "and now we'll work together!"

"Ay! to the end, Clavis Warne! You can be trusted to the death. But we must work, for the fourteenth is one week from to-night."

Clavis Warne lowered the light, and then, between him and his singular visitor, there ensued a long and an earnest conversation.

"Then, to-morrow night will be the time. It must not be postponed later! And it is dangerous now in the mansion for me. I must stay with you for a time."

The old visitor slept that night, a sweet sleep, upon the lounge in the office of the showman.

CHAPTER XXX.

A NIGHT-SCENE ON THE PLAIN.

ST. CLAIR ARLINGTON paced anxiously up and down the limits of the library. It was a dead hour of night—and the night—the one after the strange occurrences in the room of the showman.

"Yes!" he muttered, "fortune has again favored me, and, as I have found it, so shall all be mine! Yes, I swear it! I cannot hesitate now! I must follow the star that guides me! I cannot put it off longer. I'll go!"

So saying he paused. Then stepping softly to the rear of the library, he took up a field compass, lifted it gently, and brought it near the light. Placing it carefully down, he allowed the sensitive needle to oscillate for a moment, as it settled down to its point of attraction.

Then Mr. Arlington took from his pocket his large memorandum-book, and drawing from it a piece of faded, yellow-stained paper, he spread it out.

The paper was covered with dottings of courses, and marked here and there with the points of the compass. Consulting the needle, which now stood motionless, he made out the courses as marked on the piece of paper.

At once he started and a pallor came to his cheek.

"My God! is there any fatality in this? That spot is where the Shadow appears! But, what care I?" he suddenly exclaimed, straightening up and standing erect. "What care I for a thousand Shadows provided I can lay hands on the gold! and, as long as I possess that magic scrap of paper—the Will!"

By heavens! with these at my disposal, I can defy the world. And now, both are in my grasp; the gold is mine, and the paper—the precious scrap—in this memorandum-book!"

As he spoke he opened the leaves of the little book referred to, and looked through it. His search became eager. Every leaf he turned; into every pocket he drove his trembling fingers, but in vain: the scrap was not there!

"Gone! gone!" he muttered. "Gone like the book, and yet, I placed it there myself! Are there really spirits in this old mansion? Nay! I'll not be thwarted now! Nothing can turn me, for I'll have gold—bright, shining gold in abundance! I must go!"

He arose, replaced the compass, and then, throwing on a heavy overcoat, he lowered the light. In a moment he emerged from the rear-door of the library, gently closed it behind him, and strode away over the dreary, desolate waste-land.

On his shoulder he carried a pick, a heavy hoe and a shovel.

He paused not until he reached an old, decayed poplar, standing alone and dreary in the wide common. Here he stopped for a moment, and then glanced around him.

Suddenly, however, he strode away, going nearly at right-angles to the course he first pursued. On and on! Then his steps grew slower and slower. Then they stopped still, as suddenly looking up, he saw distinctly, not thirty yards away, two motionless figures standing on the very spot to which he was hastening—the spot on which the wonderful Shadow had always made its appearance.

They stood perfectly quiet, and to the rear of them, faintly in the background, was the dim shape of a wagon.

Silently for a moment St. Clair Arlington gazed at the singular sight, and then, as a strange feeling of awe crept over him, he turned with a deep, suppressed anathema on his lip, and shrunk away in the gloom.

When he had gone, the two motionless figures set to work, with picks and spades. The ground was frozen hard. The work was laborious; but they kept on, without scarcely stopping to breathe.

At length one of them, as he drove his pick down, said suddenly:

"We have found it, young man. Run and bring the old carpet, and be not afraid to touch it!"

The other went to the wagon, and returned at once, bringing with him the large roll of carpet.

He looked on, as the other gently threw aside the frozen clods.

Then a ghastly sight was revealed. The other—he who had brought the carpet—turned fainting away. But, at a sign from the old man he rallied, and, leaning down, gave his assistance to the work.

The ghastly object, rattling and stiff, was rolled gently in the carpet, and, between the two, was carried to the wagon and deposited in it.

Then the two men returned again, and once more fell to work. They had dug down about three feet deeper when they struck something hard. The elder man paused, and muttered:

"'Tis safe! We'll remove it, and be off!"

In a few moments they had unearthed a large iron-bound chest, covered with clay and mold. After a considerable effort, they succeeded in dragging it from the hole to the surface, and, after resting for a moment, they hauled it to the wagon, and lifted it in.

"These are the contributions I make to the tableaux, Clavis Warner!" said the old man, in a low, exultant breath. "And now we'll go."

In a moment more they had entered the wagon, and were driving rapidly toward Labberton.

The next day the showman, accompanied by his landlord, went over to the Arlington mansion, to ask of the owner the privilege of showing his magic-lantern views and tableaux—*gratis*—as a sort of advertisement to any future shows to be held and exhibited when the hall in the village could be suitably arranged.

They found Mr. Arlington haggard and care-worn. But, without hesitating he gave his consent. The showman thanked him, placed in his hands a number of cards of invitation, for any friends he might choose to have come, and then left.

Arlington rather welcomed the coming exhibition, for he was sick at heart and troubled in mind.

Then the week slowly passed.

Agnes Arlington, pale, almost broken-hearted, sat hour after hour, awaiting the time when she was to stand up and plight her troth to Delaney Howe. And the terrible day was fast approaching. She had been informed by Delaney that the marriage, for reasons of his own, would take place at his mother's. And the poor girl had consented.

The day rolled around—the eventful day; and then Delaney Howe came and escorted the impassive Agnes to his mother's.

St. Clair Arlington did not go. Only Fanny went with her poor, heart-broken mistress.

At the close of this day the showman's wagon drove up. He was accompanied by a strange-looking old man, in Turkish costume. They lifted from the wagon a long case and a short box, both covered with green baize.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MARRIAGE SCENE AND A TABLEAU.

The night had gloomed down black and threatening upon the earth—the night of the 14th of December—the anniversary of old John Arlington's disappearance—the wedding eve of Agnes Arlington to a man she hated—this the night when a select company had been invited by St. Clair Arlington to witness tableaux and magic-lantern views at the old mansion.

A bright light flashed from the single window of the widow Howe's humble home—a light brighter than that which usually shone there. Something unusual was going on.

Standing in the center of the little room, book in hand, was a solemn-faced, benevolent looking man. He had just opened the book, and his kindly eyes were resting on the two persons who stood before him.

Those two persons were Agnes Arlington and Delaney Howe—the former clad in sober black as always, her face care-worn, pain-stricken, almost expressionless as it was emotionless. The latter was clad from "tip to toe" in a shining, glossy suit of black, and his face wore a glad, triumphant glow.

Near the couple and on either hand stood the widow, in new, scrupulously neat attire, and Dora, dressed in spotless white, a sad, pitying, half-wild expression on her marble-like face.

After the usual responses and the consequent declaration, and benediction by the minister, the marriage was over. Delaney Howe and Agnes Arlington were man and wife! Then the minister, after speaking his congratulations in a low, indistinct voice, as if he was not in earnest, left, and then the family was alone.

When the minister had gone it was noticed that Dora Howe had suddenly disappeared. No one had seen her go. But this was nothing unusual with her, and special attention was not paid to the fact.

Seated in a chair by the log fire, Agnes leaned her head on her hand, and prayed to God that she might die. The old mother sat by her side, and spoke gentle words in her ear; but, they were not heeded by the pale-faced woman, who had bartered her heart and her peace of mind away.

Delaney Howe had scarcely spoken since the farcical ceremony was over. But, now, as he stood by the chimney-piece, gazing into the coals, he suddenly started, and glanced at the old Dutch clock in the corner of the room.

"I have an invitation to attend the tableau entertainment to-night at the mansion," he said. "Will you go, Agnes?" and he looked down at her.

The girl recoiled from the man. But she recovered herself, and said:

"No, Delaney; I am tired, and, with your permission, I'll remain here."

"All right, of course. Don't go, if you're disinclined. But, I *must* go, for Sainty—that's your uncle, Agnes—will expect me, and I cannot disappoint him. Expect me back soon."

With this, he drew on his overcoat, and taking his hat, left the house without another word.

Early that evening Mr. Arlington strode up and down his library. One or two of the invited ones had arrived, and had been shown into the large dining-room of the mansion, wherein the "show" was to be given. The apartment was already lit by many lights. Stretched across the rear end was a long green curtain. Behind that screen the showman and his assistant in Turkish costume were still busily engaged at work, getting ready.

The guests began to come in more frequently.

St. Clair Arlington heard the rattle of carriage wheels, the slamming of doors, and the voices of the guests. He paused suddenly in his promenade.

"I *must* go! go *now*!" he muttered. "Something impels me, and I will have time before that mummery begins!"

He quickly lowered the light and left the library by the back-door. He was soon out upon the plain, and, as on a previous night, he carried a pick and shovel on his shoulder.

He strode rapidly on. The moon was shining down brilliantly.

In twenty minutes St. Clair Arlington paused and peered ahead of him. He was near the spot which was his destination.

He did not hesitate long; but, as if summoning up a needful courage, he strode on again. In a few minutes he paused again, and then he started back wildly.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "What is this?" and, with starting eyes, he gazed down into the deep hole at his feet.

"Cheated! Cheated!" he moaned, "and all is lost! I must be gone! I must fly! When this mummery is over I'll go!"

With that he staggered back over the plain toward the brilliantly-lit mansion.

When he reached the house his face was white and his step faltering. The guests all had assembled, and as Mr. Arlington stepped into the entry he saw Delaney Howe disappear in the large dining-room, wherein the entertainment was to take place.

Then, pausing a moment to compose himself, St. Clair Arlington opened the door and went in.

The room was filled in every available portion, and glancing around him the host saw many strange faces; he was certain he had not invited them. But there was no time for comment; for as soon as he had made his appearance, the showman stepped promptly forward and announced that the entertainment would commence at once.

Then the lights were extinguished here and there, leaving only a few burning, thus throwing the auditorium, so to speak, into darkness.

The glaring bull's-eye of the lantern showed upon the object-curtain. And then, in rapid succession, view after view was thrown out—the showman accompanying each with appropriate explanations.

At length there was a pause of some minutes. The figures of the showman and his assistant were plainly visible behind the curtain, busily making arrangements for another view. And then the former strode out in front of the curtain and said:

"I hope my friends near the entrance will keep the door closed, as the wind flares the light in the lantern and makes the views imperfect. And I would state to the company that the evening's entertainment will close with one more view and a *tableau*! The audience is particularly requested to remain perfectly quiet, as the view and tableau will need no explanation."

The showman disappeared. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the bull's-eye glare of the lantern showed another view—an enlarged copy of a leaf of paper on which was writing.

One glance at the paper, as shown by the magnifying lens, and St. Clair Arlington, with a loud cry, sprung to his feet. He was immediately followed by Delaney Howe.

The writing, which stood out so plainly, and at which all stared, read thus:

"I am displeased at Agnes and her willful conduct, and such conduct! Can I forget it? Never, so help me heaven! She disobeyed me in a slight command. Would she not have done the same, whatever that command had been? St. Clair, my brother, is needy. Shall he have my property, allowing, as he may see fit, something to my willful daughter? Yes, this seems good; and yet, Agnes, Agnes! she is my daughter! No—no! by heavens! I'll not disinherit her! It would be monstrous! She shall not remember with fear and hate her still doting father."

"JOHN ARLINGTON."

The room was instantly in confusion, and cries resounded, high and threatening. And then again the voice of the showman, ringing clear and stern above the din, was heard:

"Now, friends, gaze on the *tableau*, and watch the door!"

Instantly the room was aglow with flashing lights, suddenly lit, and then the green curtain was hurled aside.

A ghastly picture was presented. Within a glass case, the light streaming full upon it, were the withered remains of a dead man—a knife sticking in his breast!

To the one side of this stood a large chest, opened; gold in heaps and massive plate were glittering within it. On top, in large letters, on a piece of pasteboard, the words, JOHN ARLINGTON'S FORTUNE!

With another wild cry, St. Clair Arlington turned, and avoiding the door, which he knew to be guarded, he dashed through the window, carrying sash and all with him. He was instantly followed by Delaney Howe.

Some of the sheriffs, who were in the room in disguise, sprung through the door, and darted in pursuit. But all trace was quickly lost, though they did not give up the chase.

It was now between eleven and twelve o'clock, and the moon was shining brilliantly down.

A man crept along the plain, glancing about him in every direction. Suddenly he paused. Not twenty yards from him was the dark Shadow! The man trembled, and turned as to fly. But at that moment, pale and dim before him, rose a white figure, standing facing the Shadow. It was waving its arms sadly to and fro, and the Shadow made the same movement.

The man looked steadily at the figure; he slowly drew a pistol, cocked it, and muttered:

"Be you man, devil or ghost, I'll try you!"

As he spoke he quickly extended his arm, and pulled the trigger of the deadly weapon. A faint flash of light illumined the gloom, then a sharp report rung out; then a low wail pealed on the night-air, and the white figure, flinging up its arms, reeled away.

"My God! my God! what have I done!" exclaimed the man, in an agonized voice. "That voice—that voice! Ha! well met, St. Clair Arlington!" he suddenly cried, as a man rushed by him, "you brought me to this—you have ruined me—you have dyed my hands in blood and the reckoning hour has come!"

"Back! back, Delaney Howe! I am mad! And—" he could say no more, for, at that moment, the other sprung upon him.

Then ensued a desperate struggle, but St. Clair Arlington was no match for the frenzied man who clutched him.

Back, back, Delaney Howe pressed him; and, at length, the struggling men stood on the verge of the pit, which had so long held its dark secret.

A moment more and a bright blade flashed in the air, then it descended, driven by the full force of Delaney Howe's arm, and St. Clair Arlington, with a gurgling groan, fell backward, lifeless, into the dark hole.

Delaney Howe paused not, but dashed along. On he fled. He looked not behind him, and then he stood in the dark woods. He plunged in heedless of briars and obstructions. In ten minutes he stood at the entrance of the cave; then he entered. He knew the passage and he groped his way on. At length he reached the door; in a moment he had opened it, and entered. He paused; he heard the sound of heavy breathing as of men sleeping. A grim smile crept over his face. Quietly he stole in, and felt around him. He soon found what he was seeking; it was a bag, and it sent forth a metallic ring as he handled it.

"He turned at once, and, setting a heavy spring on the outside, he cautiously removed the key from the lock, sprung outside, and, hurling the door to, he hurried away.

The door at the mansion was suddenly hurled open, and a white-faced woman—her hair disheveled, her dress torn, her eyes staring wildly, her limbs failing beneath her, fell into the hall.

"For God's sake! Come—Dora—is dying!" and she sunk in a swoon.

And Clavis Warne, now undisguised, stood there. By his side was the long-missing old man, crazy Noon—the servant of old John Arlington.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANGELS' WINGS.

A STRANGE and terrible scene was that presented one hour after the events of the last chapter.

The time, midnight; the place, the humble home of the widow Howe.

Reclining in a chair, her face pale as the whitest marble, her soft eyes, fading and almost lusterless, raised on high, her spotless garments bathed in a ruby tide of her life's blood, welling from her side, sat Dora Howe.

Her left hand was clutched tight in that of Clavis Warne, who, with agonized face, tear-dimmed eye, knelt by her side.

The kind-hearted physician of the village held her right hand—his sensitive finger on the flickering pulse, flashing swiftly away.

The man of science had done all that lay in the power of earthly remedies, but he could not stanch the flowing tide. A deep artery, far beyond his reach, had been severed.

Before the dying girl, and the kneeling, stricken man, stood the man of God—the same who had officiated at the marriage scene of four hours since. This time, too, he held an open book in his hand. His fatherly face was wet with falling tears.

Lying on the bed, motionless as death, was the poor heart-broken mother. Near her, upon her knees, her glorious golden hair in wild disarray, her head propped up on the bed, was Agnes.

The stricken girl in the chair closed her eyes for a moment, and her lips murmured faintly to herself. Then she aroused herself and glanced around her. Her breath was fearfully rapid.

"Brandy! brandy! doctor!" she moaned. "I have something—something to say!—I—I—must say it!"

Without a word the physician reached out and took a wine-glass, containing the stimulant, from the mantle-piece. He placed it to the lips of the girl. She drank deeply.

A moment or so of stifling silence passed. Suddenly the girl raised her drooping head.

"Listen, friends. I—I—have my reason again now! One winter night, a year ago *this night*—old John Arlington came across the bridge and entered the plain. He had been drinking. He was followed by two men, walking some distance apart. I was out that night, wandering! wandering!—for my soul was at unrest—and—and—but I must hurry—my sands are fast running! The old man stumbled along. The one behind him hastened up. Then a pistol-shot rung in the air. Old John Arlington fell. The man rushed up to him, and leaned down. At that moment the other, who had lingered behind, ran up. A struggle ensued, but the last comer was

more powerful; he flung his antagonist to the ground. And then he said, wickedly: 'I'll help you!' With that, he drove a knife into the still breathing body of the old man. Oh! God. They rifled his body—and then one of them went for a pick and a spade, and they buried the old man under the snow—under the hard earth! I heard the voices; I knew the men. They were ST. CLAIR ARLINGTON—and—and—oh! God!—my poor brother, DELANEY. Then another figure appeared. It was poor old Crazy Noon. They fired at him, and he fell, too! I then fled. And, my friends, *I always went to the spot*, and mourned over the old man—went there when the moon was shining—on the 14th! For a strange infatuation led me thither, and—and—I made the *Shadow*!—I dared not tell the horrible tale—for my poor, dear brother would have been in danger. But, the time has come—and—and—ah! God!—he has murdered me! But—but—kind friends, harm him not! He knew not it was I!"

She paused. The red blood was still flowing profusely from the terrible wound. A cold shudder passed over her frame. She suddenly whispered:

"And now—now—Clavis—darling—idolized Clavis—are you ready?" and she pressed his hand.

He bowed his head and still kneeling, took both her hands in his.

Then ensued a wondrous solemn scene. The awe-inspiring ceremony was over, and Clavis Warne and Dora Howe were united at last.

A wild, exultant fire for a moment gleamed in the eyes of the dying girl; a heavenly smile lighted up her seraphic features, and she murmured, in a voice just audible:

"At last! AT LAST! Kiss me, Clavis—my HUSBAND!"

Then her head went down slowly upon his shoulder, the dark masses falling upon his bosom.

A moment, and the physician said, in a voice that sounded preternaturally solemn:

"Dead!"

A holy silence settled in the death-chamber.

The air was fanned by the sweep of angels' wings.

L'ENVOI TO THE READER.

There is but little now to say.

Old crazy Noon corroborated all that was told by poor Dora Howe, and added that the murderers had flung *his* body into the creek. He revived with the shock, crawled out upon the ice, and dragged himself to the mansion, where, watching his opportunity, he crept in and secreted himself in the garret.

Gradually he had recovered. Knowing many of the old secret passages with which the house was filled, he readily managed to get out and obtain food. He was the shadowy shape about the house—the person who had taken the memorandum-book from Delaney Howe's vest-bosom; also the scrap; and the one who had made the mysterious noises about the mansion. He it was, too, who had written the letters to Clavis Warne. He it was who, away back in one of the "visions," had helped his old master to bury the treasure.

Time passed on. Nothing was heard of Delaney Howe—and at the end of one year, Agnes obtained a regular divorce.

Eighteen months from the night of that death-bed wedding scene, there was another marriage—a very quiet one, at the mansion. Agnes and Clavis were at last united in holy wedlock.

The poor old mother—the Widow Howe—rapidly followed her unfortunate daughter to the grave, dying of a broken heart.

Mother and daughter were both buried in the little Padroon Cemetery, and a monument was in time erected over each, by Clavis Warne and his wife.

The terrible cave secret, two blackened skeletons—at last came to light. But none knew of this terrible ending of the "Buccaneers of the Plain."

Clavis Warne and Agnes live to this day in the old mansion, and Crazy Noon is still body-servant to the new master.

THE END.

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